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The profession and practice of screenwriting in British cinema : the 1920s and 1930s

The Profession and Practice of Screenwriting in British Cinema: The 1920s and 1930s

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Abstract

This thesis examines the development of screenwriting values and practices in British cinema between 1927-1939. Examining the indigenous response to technological and structural changes which were articulated in a series of instructional screenwriting manuals, this study proposes the construction of a new critical paradigm. Specifically, it identifies the utility of Pierre Bourdieu's field model in explaining how different notions of capital function to determine how and why dominant normative practices emerge, and become institutionalised.

Part I engages with existing historical, critical and theoretical perspectives on screenwriting, and specifically screenwriting in interwar Britain. It outlines shortcomings of previous positions, and articulates the advantages of adapting the field model as a means of conceptualising and interrogating the screenwriting field. Notions of capital, doxa and competitive struggle define the understanding and development of screenwriting practice. By distinguishing concepts of 'classicism' in relation to story, it problematises the ubiquitous success of the classical Hollywood narrative as an 'inevitable' screenwriting paradigm. In turn, it proposes a new conceptual space occupied by screenwriting manuals. Not just a means of replicating normative practice, by acknowledging the author's agency, the manual becomes a locus for debates and discourses which both structure, and are structured by, normative practice.

Part II utilises this theoretical perspective to examine how British screenwriting negotiated its system of values with the changing structure of the industry during this period. It looks specifically at British screenwriting in relation to story composition, the star system, and the introduction of sound. The struggle to articulate a distinctly British, cinematic paradigm of practice is contrasted with other writing paradigms, notable that of classical Hollywood. The difficulty in implementing these values in practice is also considered in each section. Avoiding questions of taste, Part II examines how and why normative techniques are established, and reveals the arbitrary construction of 'inevitable' screenwriting practices.

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I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author:

SIGNED: D.S. Witten ..... DATE: 27/2/08

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Part I

Chapter 1: British Screenwriting and British Film Culture

> The writer is the most important person in Hollywood, but we must never tell the sons of bitches.[1]
>
> Irving G. Thalberg

The practice and profession of screenwriting is a neglected part of British film history, and British cinema is not alone in this regard. Screenwriting occupies an unusual position in the study of cinema; the screenplay constitutes a vital part of the production process, yet it remains critically and popularly neglected. This is further complicated in Britain by questions of legitimacy emanating from other literary mediums, and the tensions inherent in bifurcated conceptions of cinema as art or as industrial product. However, there has been a revived interest in how screenwriting is taught and practiced in recent years. This has been lead in the public sphere by organisations such as Skillset and the UK Film Council, who are attempting to organise and improve screenwriting training across the UK. The accreditation of certain institutions to teach screenwriting craft contributes to a developing standardisation in practice, a greater understanding of writing skills and the professionalisation of the industry. In addition, screenwriting 'gurus' such as Robert McKee and Syd Field have raised the public profile of screenwriting pedagogy through the aggressive sales of their books and courses.[2] Academic interest in screenwriting has remained at a constant, if low level, since the publication of Richard Corliss's book on screenwriters in Hollywood.[3] Monographs on individual writers continue to be produced, as well as occasional industrial histories, particularly on Hollywood. However, screenwriting practice, past and present, has received little critical attention in either academic or contemporary craft circles. Western screenwriting practices tend to unquestioningly replicate the practices of the past, with little thought to how they were originally produced. Because the teaching, practice and profession of

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[1] David Kipen, The Schreiber Theory: A Radical Rewrite of American Film History (Hoboken: Melville House, 2006)
[2] Robert McKee, Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting (London: Methuen, 1999)
[3] Richard Corliss, Talking Pictures: Screenwriters of Hollywood (London: David & Charles, 1975)

screenwriting have received little critical examination, the implications of such normative paradigms on issues of authorship, storytelling and national cinema remain unexplored. Further, the dominance of auteur theory in critical discourses has marginalised the screenwriter as a creative force. The definition of 'success' for a screenwriter may be less an authorial 'signature', than the ability to adapt his or her writing style to the assignment at hand. As such, the writer has rarely been 'sold' as the author of a film, whereas the director or star central to the public's understanding of the cinematic product they consume. Finally, the contribution of screenwriters has been neglected by film studies as the screenplay, rather than the film itself, is sometimes perceived as an 'unfinished' object of study.[4]

However, if we accept that 'British cinema' is not made up solely by a body of films, but also by the intersections of a number of discourses - journalism, criticism, correspondence, fan responses, and by wider debates on art and culture - then research on these other discourses helps to build a more complete cultural picture. Thus, 'British cinema' becomes less an agreed canon of films, and more a constructed idea, and a site of competing and at times contradictory discourses. One way to better understand British screenwriting and screenwriting manuals is to understand how they 'fit' into the current construction of cinema history.

British cinema history between the two world wars has been structured around a number of paradigm-shifting events whose impact were strongly felt within the industry: the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, the transition to sound, and the arrival of American producing firms in the early 1930s. However, the discursive and practical response to these seismic events are not easily divided into 'before' and 'after'; rather they are more nuanced, as individuals and institutions took time to adjust to such changes. Charles Barr uses the terms 'amnesia and schizophrenia' to describe both British cinema's relationship with the past, and the particular difficulties criticism has when coming to terms with the diversity of British cinema.[5] It might easily be applied to the study of

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[4] Pier Paulo Pasolini, "The Scenario as a Structure Designed to Become Another Structure," Wide Angle 2.1 (1977)

[5] Charles Barr, "Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia," in ed. Charles Barr, All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema (London: BFI, 1986)

screenwriting, as well as to this period of British cinema history. However, in recent years revisionist work on various aspects of British film culture has unearthed a rich variety of films, personalities, studios and genres, which reveal a cinema constituted less by 'schizophrenia', and more by a wide plurality of voices, texts and discourses. Christian Metz conceived of the relationships between the discourses which constitute this broader vision of 'cinema' as a number of 'machines': an 'industrial' machine, which is concerned with the production of films, a 'mental' machine which adapts spectators to the consumption of films, and a 'writing machine', which constantly judges and evaluates films, lauding some and denigrating others.[6] While slightly schematic, such a conception is useful as all three machines play a part in producing a more subtle approach to the history of screenwriting.

The 1930s has also suffered in comparison with what came next. It is commonly held that British cinema 'came of age' between 1939-1945; that it stepped out of Hollywood's shadow and reflected the experience of the British people at war. This is a line taken by many historians, and was commonplace in the discourses of the time. If all the components of consensus regarding notions of 'realism', 'nationality' and 'quality' were in place by the end of the 1930s, then these notions were explored during the war years. The demands of a narrative cinema in which a public mode of address was integrated with story requirements produced a confluence of documentary and narrative cinema distinct from Hollywood, the literary tradition, and which was resolutely British. A strong sense of the medium's propaganda and educational powers was stressed in fiction, rather than documentary films, in celebrated successes such as *Millions Like Us* or *Target for Tonight*. As such, the critical and discursive battles of the 1930s which laid the foundations for this period have been subsumed into a history which celebrates victory on the battlefield and on screen.[7]

However, the field responded to the changing structure of British filmmaking in the 1930s by contesting and negotiating the values held to be important in theory and in practice. While the emergence of a dominant model of

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[6] Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," Screen 16.2 Summer (1975): pp.14-76

[7] David Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy 1929-1939 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000)

British narrative cinema broadly based on Hollywood's production methods may seem inevitable in retrospect, at the time the future of the national cinema was fiercely debated. The implications of sound innovation on storytelling, structure, aesthetics, marketing and consumption were unclear. The effects of the quota – for most of its history the 'black sheep' of British cinema – were explored in theory and in practice. The arrival of the Hollywood studios in Britain brought a standard of quality to which the indigenous industry might aspire, but also a standardised system of production and distribution, which provided a stable choice of production paradigm to accept or to reject. During the 1930s, and particularly the early 1930s, the question of what British cinema was and would be was open for debate.

These questions were particularly relevant in the British screenwriting field. Classical Hollywood storytelling constituted a distinct storytelling paradigm, based upon the primary value of character-motivated action, which supported Hollywood's industrial and economic model. The success of the ubiquitous Hollywood product on British screens alongside the importation of Hollywood's storytelling techniques with the exchange of talent and the arrival of the studios in Britain powered this influential paradigm. This was set against 'legitimate' storytelling paradigms extant in British written culture, and the influence of European cinematic storytelling values. While sound brought greater responsibility and power to the screenwriter, it also brought questions of the medium's storytelling specificity as distinct from the stage. All the while, the competitive economic imperative of selling a screenplay magnified tensions between art and industry. It may be useful to ask how screenwriting fits into the existing critical and historical canon.

This period has suffered from Rachel Low's seminal history, which situated the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act as a disaster for the British film industry. She was particularly critical of British screenwriting during this period, dismissing it as 'a field particularly subject to the mediocre professional'.[8] While revisionist work has challenged her initial assertion, the role of screenwriting has been largely overlooked. However, both Brown and Babington have produced

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[8] Rachael Low, The History of the British film 1929-1939: Film Making in 1930s Britain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p.231

histories of writers Launder and Gilliat, and note their successes during this period.[9] There are numerous studies of Emeric Pressburger and his collaborations with Michael Powell.[10] Barr has examined Eliot Stannard's contribution to Hitchcock's oeuvre.[11] Harper's topographical chapter outlines the contribution of women to screenwriting in this period.[12] Gledhill touches on the value of 'story' in screenwriting practices in the 1920s.[13] While screenwriting appears in the periphery of numerous other works, it is seldom the primary focus. For examples of this kind of history, we must look across the Atlantic. The history of screenwriting in Hollywood is much more complete, from the primary interviews carried out by McGilligan to the industrial histories written by Hamilton or Corliss.[14] A number of recent works have highlighted the role of women screenwriters in Hollywood during this period.[15] These works have tended to follow a biographical methodology, charting writer or writers' entry into the industry, highlighting their successes or failures, and illuminating the text with the personalities they encountered. This is useful work, but detailed questions of craft and practice are seldom addressed. This was remedied to a certain degree by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.[16] While controversial and at times too neat in its conclusions, it does provide an exhaustive demonstration of how classical Hollywood's stable style and mode of production was established. It demonstrates how the values and practice of screenwriting were shaped to support the classical system. A source of material

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[9] Geoff Brown, Launder and Gilliat (London: BFI, 1977), Bruce Babington, Launder and Gilliat (Manchester: MUP, 2002)

[10] cf. Ian Christie, Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), Kevin Macdonald, Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), Andrew Moor, Powell and Pressburger: A Cinema of Magic Spaces (London: Palgrave, 2005)

[11] Charles Barr, "Writing Screen Plays, Stannard and Hitchcock," in ed. Andrew Higson, Young and Innocent, The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930 (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002)

[12] Sue Harper, Women in British Cinema, Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know (London: Continuum, 2000)

[13] Christine Gledhill, Reframing British Cinema 1918-1928, Between Passion and Restraint (London: BFI, 2003)

[14] Patrick McGilligan, ed., Backstory: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age (London: University of California Press, 1986), Ian Hamilton, Writers in Hollywood 1915-1951 (London: Heinmann, 1990), Corliss, Talking Pictures

[15] Cari Beauchamp, Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood (London: Prentice Hall, 1997), Lizzie Francke, Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood (London: BFI, 1994), Melissa Sue Kort, "'Shadows of Substance': Women Screenwriters in the 1930s," in ed. Janet Todd, Women in Film (London: Holmes & Meier, 1988)

[16] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960 (London: Routledge, 2002)

was American screenwriting manuals, which disseminated and stabilised the norms of the classical system. The result, as they show, is a paradigm of storytelling and screenwriting practice which has changed little to the present day.

Unlike classical Hollywood, British cinema lacked the overarching production paradigm that determined practice and integrated dissent within the system. Rather, the values of classical Hollywood constitued only one of a number of competing paradigms within British cinema, albeit one of the most influential. As a number of technological and economic changes were imposed upon British cinema, this thesis will examine the ways in which the screenwriting field negotiated the institutionalisation of these industrial forms, and question how and why normative screenwriting practices developed along the lines they did. With pressures and influences coming from a number of different positions, a consensus or system of practice did not emerge in the same way as in Hollywood. Rather, the period saw a diversity of positions competing for dominance in response to these changes.

In examining the field's response to these changes, I am utilising a number of screenwriting manuals published during this period in order to illustrate the range and diversity of responses. Screenwriting manuals have been approached by historians and practitioners with unease. Manuals tend not to propose high theory - a consideration of the aesthetic or industrial conception of cinema - because their explicit aim is directed towards practice. However, during this period the political engagement of British screenwriters meant that a discussion of aesthetics was present in several manuals. Equally problematic is that manuals may not represent or reflect normative screenwriting practice, even though this is what they purport to do. Critics who have used manuals as evidence of normative practices might be forgiven for doing so, as nearly all the work has centred on screenwriting within the classical Hollywood system. The stability of the style and mode of production has meant that screenwriting manuals published for the American field have reflected and reproduced the classical style. However, recent work by MacDonald and Morey has taken a more nuanced approach, breaking away from the monolithic conception of

manuals simply as a 'mirror' to practice.[17] I propose that manuals, on an individual and industrial basis, enter into a dialectic relationship with the screenwriting field, at one level reflecting conventions and norms, while also attempting to shape these norms. This is based explicitly on the manual author's understanding of what constitutes current instances of 'quality' practice, and how they wish to shape future notions of 'quality'. The agency of the manual's author - their position in the field, their understanding and experience of practice, their aims and ambitions – combine with the objective conditions of production to create a discourse which both structures, and is structured by, screenwriting practice.

The manual is a multifaceted document which can 'fit' into each one of Metz's machines. Perhaps most obviously, the manual can contribute towards the production process, helping the writer to guide and craft their screenplay according to the normative practices outlined by the manual author. It is as part of this machine that the screenwriting manual has been mainly utilised by critics in the past. However, as Morey demonstrates, the manual also helps to inform audience expectations of quality when watching a film, and so helps to adapt their 'mental' image to the consumption of films.[18] Finally, as part of the 'writing' machine, the manual writer chooses to reproduce examples of writing craft in accordance with his own 'taste', and as such elevates some screenplays as examples of good practice, while denigrating others. Metz's conceptualisation of these overlapping discourses is useful when examining how a text (a manual) may enlighten our understanding of screenwriting practice.

Critics' uneasy relationship with screenwriting manuals can be further attributed to the fact that the ratio of book sales to successes is insignificant. Yet, contemporary manuals are full of testimonials of the successful few who attribute their success to their particular pedagogic system or guru. There has always been a sense that screenwriting manuals are simply reworking established storytelling paradigms and re-selling them to a gullible public. Certainly manuals from the inception of cinema have cited previous theorists: William Archer's 1912 manual

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[17] Ian W. MacDonald, "Manuals are not Enough: Relating Screenwriting Practice to Theories," Journal of British Cinema and Television 1.2 (2004). Anne Morey, Hollywood Outsiders – The Adaptation of the Film Industry 1913-1934 (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)
[18] Morey, Hollywood Outsiders

Play-Making refers to notions of the 'well-made play'; while storytelling methods of Dumas, Ibsen, Shakespeare and particularly Aristotle are referred to throughout the history of screenwriting manuals.[19] While manuals draw cultural legitimacy from such references, the extent to which they draw upon these paradigms is open to debate.

The final reason for this unease is the prevalence of a mythic justification for a particular storytelling organisation given in some contemporary manuals. Epitomised in Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey*, the pedagogic impetus for such works are based upon Jungian psychology and particularly the work of Joseph Campbell.[20] Such works describe certain story patterns or narrative organisation that the screenwriter might use to gain success without attempting to explain why and how such practices are preferred to others. This period of British screenwriting offers the opportunity to examine how and why such choices were made, and how normative practice was formed within the expansion of a wider culture of writing.

Screenwriting manuals tend to be published in waves, as the industry opens its doors to submissions from outsiders. In the USA, the period 1913-1920 saw the first rush of manual publication as part of the series of industrial discourses which institutionalised the norms and conventions of the newly established classical Hollywood system. The transition to sound, 1928-1931, saw another series of American manuals published, to aid the integration of sound technology within the established norms and values of the classical system. In Britain, the industrial transition to sound occurred at the same time; by 1933, almost all professional production was in sound. The equivalent publishing bloom of British manuals came later, between 1933-1937. Ten British manuals were published in the period between the two Cinematograph Acts, which broadly mirrors the period between introduction of sound in Britain at the beginning, and the outbreak of war at the end. These ten manuals form the foundation of this study, acting as a locus for the debates within the field during this period. In addition, manuals by Americans Lane and Marion were published

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[19] William Archer, Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship (Chapman & Hall, 1912)
[20] Christopher Vogler, The Writer's Journey, Mythic Structure for Writers, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Michael Wiese Productions, 1998), Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972)

in Britain in 1936 and 1937 – the same year as a translation of Rudolf Arnheim`s manual from German was published – while Montagu's translation of Pudovkin's influential *Film Technique* was published in 1933. I also refer to a number of American manuals published during this period, as well as publications from both sides of the Atlantic from before, during and after this timeframe.

This thesis will examine how the screenwriting field negotiated the challenges existing in the field, specifically how screenwriting manuals contributed to a system of values and practices which could be loosely described as a British screenwriting paradigm. Chapter 2 offers a theoretical and methodological basis for this investigation. The core of this thesis lies in Part II, which is made up of three main sections, each of which consists of two chapters. The first chapter in each section examines the field's negotiation with an institutionalised form – screenplay composition, the star system and sound – as articulated in the manuals, followed in each by a case study chapter which examines how the values and advice propounded in the manuals were realised in instances of practice. While such a methodology could never be exhaustive, it offers an insight into the relationship between theory and practice advocated by the manuals, and the diverse range of practices within the field. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the storytelling paradigms competing for dominance, and how they were reconciled with existing storytelling values, which is illustrated by a case study focussing on story value in Warner Brothers First National's British studio. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the field's negotiation of the star system, illustrated by a case study on writing for the screen career of comedian Max Miller. The field's negotiation of sound is examined in Chapters 7 and 8, with its impact on the career of writer and director Adrian Brunel used as an illustrative case study.

Each of the sections – story composition, the star system, and sound – addresses the seismic external events which shaped the British screenwriting field in the 1930s. By dividing each section into two chapters, the material can be dealt with more easily. The first chapter in each section examines the manuals' responses to the changing field. These responses were often different and contradictory, but I attempt to trace the resulting theoretical, craft approaches the manuals advocate for screenwriters to follow. This is contrasted in each section

by an illustrative case study, in which I examine the extent to which these theoretical craft practices were applied in the realities of practice. Such an approach takes account of both theory and practice without artificially dividing them, and allows for the complexities of British screenwriting practices to be examined in their theoretical and practical applications.

An adequate account of the development of dominant storytelling paradigms is not simply a matter for screenwriting manuals and scripts. Rather, it must account for a range of influences and discourses which shape the understanding of quality and practice within the field. In the next chapter, I propose a theoretical framework to understand how notions of quality were contested within the context of the institutionalisation of industrial forms. Broadly based on Pierre Bourdieu's field model, such a conception incorporates a number of different discourses and influences. The notion of habitus helps to account for the way that individuals make the kind of choices required in writing a screenplay, by reconciling the objective conditions of the field with the subjective experiences of the individual. Such an approach may avoid the largely biographical approach dominant within most histories of screenwriting, while also circumventing the deterministic tendencies of contemporary craft manuals.

Chapter 2: Theorising Screenwriting/Theorising Screenwriting Manuals

> Writing [...] is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness.[1]
>
> George Orwell, 1946

The emergence of a British screenwriting paradigm in the 1930s presented a contested and hybrid aesthetic in literary production. In the interwar period, British screenwriting was divided institutionally between art and commerce, represented respectively by the left-wing intellectual movement located in the Film Society and the publication *Close Up*, which took European and particularly Russian films as the paradigm of artistic production; and the mass appeal and success of Hollywood production. Unlike the stability of the Hollywood system, the British screenwriting paradigm was a contested form of values and practices in constant negotiation with existing storytelling paradigms located in these fields, as well as in British literary production. It was viewed as a rebellion against the stable and ubiquitous success of classical Hollywood screenwriting, the pretence of European production, and claims to cultural legitimacy from the literary field. However, during the 1930s the British film industry became increasingly professionalised, particularly the previously *ad hoc* field of screenwriting. The coming of sound, the results of the 1927 Cinematograph Act, and the arrival of American studio outposts in Britain, made filmmaking an increasingly economic concern. Partly due to the speed of these changes, partly due to the cultural perception of what a writer is, British screenwriting struggled to adapt to the shifting vista. As a result, a paradigm of practice emerged from the British screenwriting field in an attempt to formulate a set of values and practices which were nationally specific and essentially cinematic. This struggle was neither unified, nor stable, nor straightforward.

In order to investigate the emergence of a British screenwriting paradigm, I propose a theoretical and methodological position based upon Pierre Bourdieu's field model, which enables me to acknowledge that the transformation in British screenwriting was a product of specific struggles between players in this field. Bourdieu notes,

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[1] George Orwell, "Why I Write," England Your England and Other Essays (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953)

As a general rule, critics are concerned with individuals. But when you do sociology you learn that men and women are indeed responsible, but what they can or cannot do is largely determined by the structure in which they are placed, and by the positions they occupy within the structure…It is vital to understand that he is only a sort of structural epiphenomenon, and that, like an electron, he is the expression of a field. You can't understand anything if you don't understand the field that produces him and gives him his parcel of power.[2]

For Bourdieu, the strategy players adopt within a field is determined by their struggle for economic profit, cultural status or prestige, which is shaped in the first instance by the structure of the field itself. From this perspective, the origins of cultural dispositions and practices can be determined as they are refracted through the 'rules' of the field.[3] In 1930s British screenwriting, these rules were changing: cultural status, which previously held value within the field, was increasingly overshadowed by an economic motive.

In order to understand how and why a British screenwriting paradigm came to exist, the field which produced it must be understood, along with the strategies of the writers and other players within that field. The choices that the screenwriter makes are determined by their individual preferences. But how are those preferences formed? What experiences and discourses make a writer chose one instance of practice over another? Because success in screenwriting is realised in an industrial and economic product - perhaps more so than any other literary form - those preferences must be tempered by the individual's understanding of what is wanted, what is possible, and what is preferable within the context in which they are working.

It may be useful at this stage to define the main terms I intend to use throughout this thesis. Because my focus is on understanding how craft choices are made, my terminology emanates from craft practices. By 'story', I mean the deliberate telling of a series of events designed to entertain. The writer creates story through their choice of 'story resources', that is, settings, characters and events which constitute the building blocks of the story. I use the term 'narrative' for the process of that telling, and the term 'narrative organisation' for the

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[2] Pierre Bourdieu, On Television and Journalism (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p.54
[3] Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, ed. Randall Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp.29-73

choices the writer makes in organising their story resources in order to achieve their desired narrative effect. I have avoided the term 'plot' throughout, partly because it is a contentious term within narrative studies. I also wish to avoid formalist discussions of story/plot (or *fabula/ syuzhet*), which are tangential to my central aim of understanding how normative craft practices were formed. Before doing so, it is useful to examine briefly the critical methodologies previously adopted by the discipline, and demonstrate how screenwriting manuals act as a locus for the discourses prominent within the field.

As Bourdieu notes, critics are, by and large, concerned with individuals. This has been the approach most often employed when examining screenwriting. Richard Corliss established the methodology which subsequent critics have tended to follow.[4] This method focuses on the personal histories of individual writers, or on working conditions within the industry. While there have been a number of works on Hollywood screenwriting, particularly on the early years of production, British screenwriting has enjoyed less attention than in other national cinemas.[5] Raynauld analyses French practice to 1923, while Olsson has studied surviving Swedish screenplays from 1912.[6] These works, while unearthing new information, have a limited scope and lack the critical methodology which would allow them to account for some of the broader questions they raise. For example, Fine notes that in his book,

> there is very little mention, for instance, of writers' specific screenplays, much less more general contributions to the art of the modern picture: I have not explained the difference between fiction and film in terms of technique…my focus, on the other hand, remains consistently on how writers viewed, in the context of the profession of authorship, the movie industry and the complicated process by which movies reached the screen.[7]

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[4] Corliss, Talking Pictures

[5] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema , Kristin Thompson, "Narrative Structure in Early Classical Cinema," in ed. John Fullerton, Celebrating 1895, The Centenary of Cinema (London: John Libbey, 1998), Barry Salt, Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis, 2nd ed. (London: Starwood, 1992)

[6] Isabelle Raynauld, "Written Scenarios of Early Cinema: Screenwriting Practices in the First Twenty Years in France " Film History 9.3 (1997), Jan Olsson, "Magnified Discourse: Screenplays and Censorship in Swedish Cinema in the 1910s," in ed. John Fullerton, Celebrating 1895, The Centenary of Cinema (London: John Libbey, 1998)

[7] Richard Fine, Hollywood and the Profession of Authorship 1928-1940 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985), p.16

These works perform an archaeological rediscovery within their periods and areas of study, but lack the meta-critical tools to ask other questions: Why did the profession develop along the lines it did? How and why were the normative practices institutionalised at the script stage? How and why did classical narrative techniques become the industrial norm in Western cinema?

To address craft questions, critics often turn to screenwriting manuals to gain an insight into scripting practices.[8] However, the relationship between manuals and practice is more complex than simple replication. Critical writing about screenwriting has asked superficial questions to identify the norms, methods and practices of the industry without asking how and why such practices were established. However, in more recent works, critical discourses have begun to address these more complex questions. Morey and MacDonald conceptualise manuals as a means of locating individuals within the field in which they work. The development of such an approach allows critics to analyse and question the profession and practice of screenwriting as a product of the field that produced it.

Morey's analysis of the Palmer Photoplay Corporation's Writing Course reveals the complex relationships and discourses which structured the teaching, learning and practice of American screenwriting between 1918 and 1925. Such work, while only one chapter on her broader theme of 'Hollywood Outsiders', provides a methodological example of how screenwriting theory and practice may be interrogated. Morey closely links her analysis to historical conditions of the field, and notes that the Palmer Corporation's discourses mirror those of self-improvement, Taylorisation and mechanisation, all dominant industrial trends during her period of study. The Corporation's rhetoric, 'to create a "better" audience, more engaged, more informed, more invested in Hollywood – in short, an audience knowledgeable about, and thus sympathetic to the industry and the medium', offsets the implicit but unstated principle of financial reward and individual success.[9]

Morey's methodology is based on a close reading of the Palmer Corporation's instructional correspondence. An examination of this

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[8] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.107
[9] Morey, Hollywood Outsiders, p.71

correspondence explicates the way that the Corporation promoted 'codified norms' which became prevalent within the film industry. By examining publicity materials, financial records and personal accounts, Morey highlights the way that Palmer Corporation products were sold and consumed. The case study of the Palmer Corporation unravels the complex discourses surrounding the teaching and practice of screenwriting. Importantly, she notes the gap between pedagogic screenwriting theory, and the achievement of writing a successful screenplay. The Palmer Corporation's aim - to improve the individual - emanates from discourses of Taylorisation. However, her reading also reveals the implicit didactic discourse within such texts: they have their economic, political or ideological message.

Similarly, MacDonald's work on contemporary screenwriting pedagogy proposes taking a broader, meta-critical view in order to teach screenwriting better:

> We need to take more account of the process, of the background of the players involved, of their modus operandi and of the ways they interact throughout, for example, script development. We need to take account of screenwriting within the current field of the moving image, of the internal structure of that field (and the status of the writer, for example), of the position of the field within the field of power.[10]

Such an approach might account for how distinctions of quality are made; how some screenwriting practices become enshrined as 'natural'; and how success is measured and gained. Recognising the structures which run through the field allows for a meaningful interrogation of the industry. Indeed, MacDonald has argued that the simple replication of existing craft practices is inadequate and uncritical when it comes to better understanding screenwriting theory and practice.[11] While laudably proposing that screenwriting as a field should be addressed in broader terms, MacDonald's premise that 'manuals are not enough' similarly fails to expand the current thinking on screenwriting manuals in relation to practice.

Because of the importance of these structures, understanding how notions of quality are established is vital in order to understand the successes or failures

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[10]MacDonald, "Manuals are not Enough," p.261
[11] Ibid.: p.260

of an individual's choices. This is one of the reasons that screenwriting has been problematic for critics. Histories focussing on particular individuals fail to address how they understood and interacted with the field in order to be successful. The field model, with its emphasis on individual agency contextualised within the structures of the field, can address these concerns. One of my main methodological resources will be to utilise screenwriting manuals, which act as a 'bridge' between the individual and the field, and between screenwriting theory and practice.

Screenwriting manuals occupy an uncomfortable space. They notionally act as mediator, breaking down normative practice as understood by the field in such a way that the writer can reassemble it in practice. In the past, critical approaches have been limited to conceptualising manuals as part of the mechanism which enshrines and disseminates normative practice.[12] The individual agency of the manual's author has been ignored in the limited number of critical approaches which have focussed mainly on American manuals operating within the Hollywood system. The establishment of classical Hollywood's codified norms by the 1920s enshrined certain practices within an economic and storytelling paradigm, which early manuals helped to disseminate. The speed with which these practices were enshrined, and the dominance of Hollywood classicism as a narrative and industrial form within Western cinema has left little scope for examining manuals as anything other than as a part of this system of replication. This negates the author's agency and intentions in producing a manual. The dominant view is that manuals have two related functions: as part of the machinery which standardises, establishes and maintains normative practices, and as a cipher which negotiates theory and practice for the reader. Thompson, writing about scriptwriting in television, takes a typical approach:

> Although such manuals are not high-level theory, on a practical level they can tell us much about the aesthetic norms of commercial television. They often lay out primary conventions very explicitly. We find some advice given over and

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[12] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.97

> over in several manuals, providing good evidence that the techniques discussed are normative within the industry.[13]

This singular idea of the manual as a one-way flow of normative technique from the field to the reader only examines one aspect of their *raison d'etre*. This approach is perhaps unsurprising, as such dissemination of normative techniques is what screenwriting manuals generally purport to do. Indeed, the author's mastery of normative practice is an essential component of how manuals are marketed and sold.

In the past, critics have grouped manuals together, looking for patterns with which to form a meta-analysis of industrial practice. Provided, like Thompson, they show caution, such a generalised account can provide insight into such industrial practices. However, this approach can be reductive, treating diverse texts as homogenised. By searching for recurring patterns, divergent or exceptional instances of practice may be ignored. Furthermore, such an analysis ignores individual agency within the production and reception of single texts. The manuals' role in negotiating theory and practice can be understood by conceptualising them as part of the field. By examining manuals as a diverse canon rather than Thompson's singular entity, the agency and politics of authorship can be addressed, while considering a more complex relationship between the manual and the reader, and the manual and the field. This moves away from the idea of the manual as a mere cipher, relaying practice from the field to the reader, and takes into account the relationship between the author's agency and the objective conditions of the field.[14]

However, in Britain in the 1930s, such 'primary conventions' and normative techniques were not yet established, and were fiercely contested by the field. British screenwriting practice drew from a number of storytelling paradigms. The values represented by such paradigms were contested in the discourses of the day and in practice. Within this context, the publication of a manual represented a strategy employed by the author in the struggle to

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[13] Kristin Thompson, Storytelling in Film and Television (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 36-37

[14] The notion of capital in the Bourdieusian rather than Marxian sense is particularly important in this model, as the distribution of capital determines the relative positioning in the field, and ruling the field (i.e. determining normative practice) is the object of this complex relationship.

maximise their position within the field. At times, the advice given in a particular manual differed from what was actually happening in professional production, as the author attempted to impose the values and practices that they held as important. Manuals also had to react to the changing realities of film production in Britain. Classical Hollywood's compositional values, the star system, and the adoption of sound in films, which functioned as both a storytelling and an economic system, were not automatic choices in British filmmaking.

Screenwriting manuals as texts both revealed normative practices (as understood and replicated by the author), and structured those practices.

The importance and publication of screenwriting manuals in the 1930s was part of an increasing culture of writing in Britain. Between the world wars, the demand for commercial culture in Britain altered dramatically. Book and magazine publishing had expanded towards the end of the nineteenth century because of technological innovations and increasing demand. People bought and consumed newspapers in greater numbers. The cinema became a site of mass entertainment; it was the dominant paid leisure activity in 1930s Britain.[15] Mathieu attributes this to the increasing population growth of the lower-middle class, and a rise in disposable income and leisure time after the First World War.[16]

As producers responded to these increases, new opportunities arose – or appeared to arise - for novice writers to fill the gap in demand. These new writers were not exclusively from privileged backgrounds that had long characterised British writing.[17] Rather, there appeared to exist an opportunity for the ordinary person to forge a career in writing. While Hilliard notes that the opportunity for those with economic and social capital greatly increased the chances of becoming a professional writer, the 1920s and 1930s did see an increase in working-class and other 'amateur' writers breaking into the field.[18] However, it remained the case that most British authors published between 1900 and 1935

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[15] John Sedgwick, "Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s," in ed. Jeffrey Richards, The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939 (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p.2

[16] D.L. Mathieu, A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp.8-10

[17] Christopher Hilliard, To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p.1

[18] Ibid., pp.2-4

were men with a public school and Oxbridge background.[19] Manuals were a consequence of the rise in the 'amateur writing movement', associated with writing magazines, correspondence schools, and writers' clubs. This movement was predominantly middle-class and geared towards magazine writing, while an equivalent movement existed in the amateur film movement.[20]

As a result of this growth in demand and in amateur writing, literary agents and authors' societies became established as a permanent fixture on the literary scene. Their advent created a mediating space between the writer and the producer. This space made possible a battery of literary advice services, offering to bring together the novice writer and the producer. Hilliard notes that,

> The emergence of writing as an organised hobby certainly occurred in tandem with the development of commercial culture. The writers' circles grew out of the constituency of the how-to-write manuals and correspondence courses that sprang up from the end of the nineteenth century, when changes in writing and publishing opened up new opportunities for freelance writers. Many writing club members sought publication in commercial outlets, though financial rewards were not the only ones that counted.[21]

This culture of writing was a response to the increase in demand, but also to an increase in supply. The 'gap' between writing outlets (publishers, magazines, film studios) and the public was filled by a layer of 'middle men' – how-to manuals, correspondence schools, articles and writing circles - which encouraged novices to engage with, and produce for the growing commercial culture. Hilliard notes that, 'Plenty of aspiring writers kept their distance from advisory services, but sufficient numbers were interested to make literary advice profitable. And among those novices who did not buy textbooks or pay for coaching, many nevertheless bought the dream of a writing career that the advice business was selling.'[22] Nowhere was this 'dream' sold more forcefully than in writing for the cinema.

Following the end of the First World War, Hollywood established itself as the world's foremost cinema in terms of style, economics and modes of

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[19] Richard Altick, "The Sociology of Authorship, The Social Origins, Education, and Occupations of 1,100 British Writers, 1800-1935," Bulletin of the New York Public Library 66 June (1962): pp.389-402
[20] Hilliard, To Exercise Our Talents, p.4
[21] Ibid., p.7
[22] Ibid., p.33

production. The potential rewards for writing a screenplay were enormous, particularly if the screenplay led to Hollywood success. After the classical approach stabilised, filmmakers could draw upon a unified set of rules and codes in production.[23] These rules could be taught as a codified set of industrial norms, the success of which, in popular terms at least, was beyond doubt. Burch refers to classical Hollywood's codes as an Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR), which consisted of conventions of *mise-en-scène*, framing, and editing so that a coherent narrative space is established in which goal-orientated protagonists overcome a series of escalating obstacles and exist to engage the spectator imperceptibly.[24] The codified understanding of these 'rules' established a benchmark to which screenwriting advice could either adhere or resist.

The rise in British amateur screenwriting in the late 1920s and 1930s mirrors the American market from the 1910s. While Hilliard asserts that, 'The way British aspirants and their would-be teachers appropriated American practices is symptomatic of the British reception of American (and European) cultural goods generally,' these practices were not uniformly assimilated. [25] The British reception of American cultural goods was particularly complex in the cinema. Despite (or equally, because of) their mass popularity, American and American-influenced British films were reviled by some intellectual and left-leaning commentators in favour of European, and particularly Russian, production.[26]

These changes created a culture of writing which offered an outlet for ordinary people to write as a form of self-expression. The rise of cinema constituted a popular and accessible form of culture for patrons across the class system.[27] Combined with the growth of indigenous production in the 1930s, there existed a shortage of film stories in the British film industry. The rules and 'secrets' of the classical approach to filmmaking, established by Hollywood's cultural and economic dominance of the British film market, were codified and distributed to aspirant filmmakers through the channels of how-to manuals and

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[23] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, pp.231-241
[24] Noel Burch, "Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response," October 11(1979)
[25] Hilliard, To Exercise Our Talents, p.24
[26] Kenneth MacPherson, "As Is," Close Up 6.4 April (1930): pp.251-253
[27] Annette Kuhn, An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002)

advice services. The demand for stories – particularly to fulfil the needs of the quota - lead to the possibility of amateur writers 'breaking into' the professional screenwriting field. Within this diverse and changing context, screenwriting evolved in both the professional and amateur ranks, and a raft of manuals were published in the 1930s.

By broadening the current paradigmatic view, to conceptualise manuals as multifaceted text key to the negotiation of notions of quality, a more nuanced understanding might be achieved of how manuals act as part of an ongoing struggle to establish normative practice, as well as for financial gain and cultural legitimacy. Such an understanding allows for the agency and politics of manual authorship to be considered, along with an exploration of the relationship between the reader and manual. An examination of how capital functions in this context will allow an interrogation of screenwriting manuals as a text with implications for readers, writers and the field of screenwriting.

In order to account for the role of screenwriting manuals in the development of a British screenwriting paradigm, the intent of the author in writing a manual must be understood. Publication is a means of gaining capital. Most obviously, it equates to a monetary gain. This need for financial return became particularly acute during the 1930s. The effects of the depression, coupled with the consequences of the slowing production after re-fitting for sound meant that many film workers were unemployed in the early 1930s.[28] The publication of a number of British manuals in the 1930s can be seen as part of a strategy of financial survival; a means by which screenwriters remained in the field when script commissions were difficult to obtain.

When Buchanan's *Film Making from Script to Screen* was published in 1937, he appears to have received a £25 advance, in addition to earning 10% of sales up to 3,000 copies sold; 12 ½ % of sales up to 5,000, and 15% after sales of 5,000.[29] Writing a manual offered the author limited financial protection against the downturn in production in the early 1930s. Equally, authors were able to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of screenwriting through

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[28] Adrian Brunel, Nice Work, The Story of Thirty Years in British Film Production (London: Forbes Robertson Ltd., 1949), p.154

[29] Paul Rotha, "Letter to Richard de la Mare", 25 March 1937, 7-3, Faber & Faber Archive, London

publication. Writing a manual allowed the author to remain visible within the screenwriting field, and to demonstrate their knowledge and expertise, their 'cultural capital'.

Further, the publication of a manual demonstrates the author's prestige as an expert within the field. However, the allocation of such prestige (the 'parcel of power') is carefully controlled by the field. In publishing Buchanan's manual, editor Richard de la Mare wrote to Paul Rotha to ask his opinion of Buchanan's manuscript. Rotha replied,

> I have been through Buchanan's articles and think that they would make an attractive and useful book, provided you can publish them at a low price. Some sort of introduction might help and also I think Buchanan should write a note saying exactly what the articles are meant to do. Illustrations, if you can afford them, would help.[30]

Rotha acts as an established expert and authorises the publication of Buchanan's manual. Through such mechanisms, the field controls who is accorded elevated status. Bourdieu notes that, 'every expression is an accommodation between an *expressive interest* and a *censorship* constituted by the field in which that expression is offered'.[31] While the author might produce their own version of screenwriting practice, this mechanism ensures that the field is able to exert some measure of control over that which can be said. The author must temper their views with the range of utterances possible within this particular context. If Buchanan's manuscript had varied wildly from Rotha's understanding of the normative practice, it would have been rejected.

The screenwriting manuals of this period proffered status to the author tacitly though the process of publication, as well as publicly through the genre's convention of a foreword. A high profile and accepted 'expert' within the field endorsed the author's legitimacy. For example, Margrave's manual begins with a foreword by Alexander Korda, who states that he is, 'flattered that such an expert on films as Seton Margrave should have selected a film by London Film Productions as the subject of such a practical approach to the elucidation of film

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, p.90

making'.[32] The majority of British manuals published during this period contain a similar introduction.

By granting such status, the manual author received a legitimised platform to define screenwriting practice and the screenwriting field as they saw fit. As Bourdieu conceptualised it, the field is, 'the site of struggle in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer'.[33] What this means in a manual is the opportunity to exclude some people from the field (those who do not conform to the author's version of what constitutes a writer), and to promote the author's preferred screenwriting values and practices as definitive in the field.

Manuals valorise certain writers, films and scripts as examples of good practice, while others are denigrated actively or by omission. This is particularly acute when manuals take specific examples from films, such as Margrave's *Successful Film Writing*, and Frances Marion's *How to Write and Sell a Screenplay*, both of which contain scripts written by American screenwriter Robert E. Sherwood. Both manuals cite certain aspects of Sherwood's script as preferred practice. However, screenplays are also the product of their conditions of production. By valorising Sherwood's script, Marion and Margrave implicitly advocate the paradigm of production in which it was produced. Sherwood's scripts are examples of classical Hollywood storytelling, and include highlighted instances of motivational causality, utilising of the star system, and a script which will appeal to a wide audience. These practices and values are made implicitly preferable by their inclusion in the manual.

The use of such examples makes distinctions within the field. Some instances of practice are legitimised at the expense of others. Such distinctions create a hierarchy within the field: some scripts are 'good', some are 'bad'. In a manual, these distinctions are a product of the author's habitus: they select script examples which they believe to be 'good' according to their understanding of

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[32] Seton Margrave, Successful Film Writing (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1936), p. vii. Similar forewords were written in the manuals published during this period by luminaries such as Leslie Howard Gordon, Roy Winton and John Grierson

[33] Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, p.44

quality. Authors are more disposed to select examples which replicate their own dispositions, values and practices.

The values and practices of classical Hollywood were well defined in the American manuals of this period. However, in Britain there was no equivalent overarching paradigm. British manual writers attempted to promote their own version of storytelling and filmmaking as dominant. They expressed individual views on screenwriting and story structure, the use of sound, the 1927 Cinematograph Act, and the star system. The consecration of certain works, writers and practices formed a web of competing discourses, each attempting to define normative practice in British screenwriting. As such, an individual manual offers an insight into the dispositions and politics of their author, as part of a strategy to help maximise their position within the field. Taken together, a group of manuals can chart the negotiation of changing industrial forms as the field attempted to define normative practices.

Another important function of screenwriting manuals during this period was in establishing screenwriting as a legitimate field within the context of British literary production.[34] Adrian Brunel recalls Temple Thurston stating that, 'We've got a quarter-of-an-hour before we need to go back, so I wonder if you'd mind telling me how you write a scenario'.[35] Such perception was typical of the British field at the time. By emphasising the demands of technical, formal and story elements, manuals contributed to discourses of professionalism within the field. The establishment of normative practices, in technical, craft and story terms set a professional benchmark to which neophyte writers could aspire. They created standards of quality within the industry. They distinguish those considered to belong to the field from those who did not. Such levels of distinction served to create a professional class of writers. The emergence of this professionalism was illustrated by the formation of the British Screenwriter's Association in 1937.

While the industry became increasingly professionalised, it does appear that amateur writers were able to 'break into' the field during this period. Examining the roll of screenwriting credits from the 1920s and 1930s reveals a

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[34] This debate has continued cf. Douglas Winston, The Screenplay as Literature (London: Tantivy Press, 1973)
[35] Brunel, Nice Work, pp.42-43

list of names who may have had only a single screenwriting credit, and about whom little is known; while the histories and documents of the period provide contradictory answers. Low argues that the, 'amateur photoplay submitted from outside the industry became a thing of the past during the early twenties, as did the popular handbook on how to write for the screen...*Close Up* in September 1929 claimed that solo scenario writing had disappeared a decade before'.[36] However, the glut of screenwriting manuals which appeared on the British market in the 1930s suggests a viable market for amateur submissions. Low accounts for this phenomenon by suggesting that, 'the handbooks or how-it-is-done type of book were designed more to interest and amuse the public than to instruct those entering the industry...The days when an amateur could read one of these books and feel equipped to start his own production company were over'.[37]

However, the manuals describe the situation differently. Lee wrote in his 1937 book that 'a considerable number of original free-lance stories are bought yearly by our scenario editors. British International Studios of Elstree does not mind from which honest source a good story comes'.[38] As one of these 'middle men', it was in Lee's interest to suggest that a market did exist. However, the number of manuals and advice columns which existed in the 1930s suggests that there was a market for would-be screenwriters. Such conflicting reports make it difficult to establish whether the studios accepted screenplays submitted by amateurs. Studios tend not to archive their 'slush pile' of received amateur scripts, and they often failed to acknowledge the origin of a particular script once a film is produced.

However, *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*, published annually for the aspirant writer in a number of literary fields, did list 'British Film Producing Firms'. Under the address of these firms, they often specified what kind of screenplay the firms were willing to accept. The 1926 listing for the Gaumont Company is typical:

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[36] Low, Film Making in 1930s Britain, p.231
[37] Ibid., p.20
[38] Norman Lee, Money for Film Stories (London: Pitman, 1937), p.8

Gaumont Company Ltd. The Company is prepared to consider novels, plays, or stories written especially for the screen. A brief outline, in narrative form, of the plot of the story should be sent in the first instance. A synopsis, some five or six typewritten pages in length, is generally sufficient for preliminary negotiations. No 'period' stories (i.e. stories involving costume other than modern) are at present required. Stories calling for difficult foreign locations can be considered only if the plot is sufficiently outstanding to justify the expense that such locations necessitate. Stories which deal entirely with the recent war are not likely to be accepted. Stories laid in mythical kingdoms are not required. Acknowledgements are not ordinarily made. Payment in full is made on acceptance of a story.[39]

Such listing suggests a willingness to accept amateur stories. The *Yearbook's* list of British Producing Film Firms continued to expand throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1927, thirteen firms were listed, with British Instructional Films requesting 'films that are true to the British characteristics…The Company is always prepared to consider scenarios, or books, from which scenarios might be made'; Mercury (Booth Grainge) Film Service, 'Producing in a small way only, "Our speciality is music films, and we are only interested in that kind of scenario"'; and Welsh, Pearson & Co, 'Open to consider scenarios, or books from which scenarios might be made'.[40] In 1929, the *Yearbook* listed twelve film producers, and referred to Arrar Jackson's preceding essay on 'Writing for the Screen', with the note that, 'As the requirements of each company conforms fairly closely to those described in the preceding article, no details are given. 'Feature' films are required, but really good series of two-reelers might interest. A series should not run to more than six'.[41] This information remained the same until the 1932 edition, when the editor noted that, 'The companies mentioned have their own studios and are likely to be in continuous production during the year. The activities of the smaller firms should be followed in the trade press'.[42] While further studios were added to the *Yearbook* in the following editions, the advice remained the same until 1939, when eighteen different production firms

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[39] Agnes Herbert, ed., The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1926 (London: A&C Black, 1926), p.199

[40] Agnes Herbert, ed., The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1927 (London: A&C Black, 1927), p.196

[41] Agnes Herbert, ed., The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1929 (London: A&C Black, 1929), p.202

[42] Agnes Herbert, ed., The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1932 (London: A&C Black, 1932), p.247
These included Admiral Pictures, wanting stories for the Quota market; Gainsborough Pictures, who wanted stories for their star players; and Warner Brothers, who wanted British comedies only.

advertised for screenplay submissions.[43] Such evidence suggests the British film firms' willingness to accept amateur submissions. Clearly, the quota picture was a market to which the amateur writer could aspire.

While it is difficult to provide concrete instances of amateur writers breaking through into the professional sphere, occasional examples do exist. In 1937, John Burch was offered a six-week contract at £25 per week by London Film Productions for a position as a writer on its scenario staff. Burch gave London Film Productions full copyright, the right to amend any work as they saw fit, and the ability to award a screen credit.[44] He never received such a credit.

This increasing professionalisation in British screenwriting manifested in the convergence of normative script practices. While American script practices had become standardised under the 'central producer' system (1914-1931), British practice had not followed suit.[45] The function of the script became more important in sound production for detailing the requirements of each shot, while achieving 'a clear, verisimilar and continuous representation of causal logic, time and space.'[46] However, in Britain, professional screenwriters did not follow a uniform style, and evidence indicates that two different styles appear to have emerged in practice from the mid-1910s to the late 1920s.[47] Unlike the American conceptualisation of the script as a blueprint for shooting, the British style attempts, 'to reconcile both a dramatic sense of performance within a scene as a unit, and the visual 'unit' of a shot or transition, on the same page…this practice attempts to show both dramatic structure and cinematic style at the same time'.[48] This relegation of technical values was at odds with the stress placed on them by Hollywood's industrial practice. This reflected the state of the profession in Britain, which remained an *ad hoc* affair during the 1920s. While the economic

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[43] Agnes Herbert, ed., The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1939 (London: A&C Black, 1939), pp.214-215

[44] London Film Productions, "Contract between London Film Productions and John Burch", 18 March 1937, Item 21, The Lajos Biro Collection, Special Collections, The British Film Institute, London

[45] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.134

[46] Ibid., p.135

[47] Ian W. MacDonald, "Playwriting for the Pictures: The Shaping of the Screen Idea in Early British Cinema." 8th BFI/Broadway Cinema Silent Cinema Conference, Nottingham, 2005

[48] Ibid.

influence of the studios led to a degree of uniformity in American practice, the paradigms of Hollywood, the literary tradition and European influences resulted in a diversity of practice in British screenwriting. Minority film culture offered an important and influential alternative to the demands of classical Hollywood.[49] However, even within this environment, the importance of the script within the production process increased during the 1920s. Discussing his 'Experiments in Ultra-Cheap Cinematography', Brunel advises filmmakers to, 'prepare your shots in elaborate script form first, working out every detail of cost, cast, camera angles and action; if you don't you will surely fall into trouble and find yourselves without enough money to complete'.[50]

These competing demands surface in the lack of continuity in script formatting during the 1920s. MacDonald argues that differences between British and American practice goes beyond technical discrepancies. Such differences have implications for the way American and British writers conceived and produced story ideas. [51] After the First World War, professional writers in Britain clearly wrote in a form or 'pre-form' of master-scene format based on a general shot, with specified shots cut in and numbered. This practice appears to originate domestically, suggesting a British response to the more complex needs of longer films. Like American practice, writers' drafts were detailed, with greater scene and stage directions and so were more visually complete. After 1923, he notes that the adoption of the US-style 'looser' master-scene format numbered consecutively and with few specified shots was a departure from the early 1920s practice. This may suggest an attempt to reconcile on the same page a dramatic sense of performance within a scene, and the visual 'unit' of a shot or transition. It demonstrates a (British) convention for clear division and subdivision. Rather than the American continuity style, these British formats are based more clearly on static dramatic structure. MacDonald suggests that the use of variations on the 'Master Scene' format may represent a low-level power struggle between writers (who wish to present their script dramatically), and directors/producers (who

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[49] Jamie Sexton, "The Film Society and the Creation of an Alternative Film Culture in Britain in the 1920s," in ed. Andrew Higson, Young and Innocent: The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930 (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002), pp. 291-305

[50] Adrian Brunel, "Experiments in Ultra-Cheap Cinematography," Close Up October 1928: p. 46

[51] MacDonald, "Playwriting for the Pictures: The Shaping of the Screen Idea in Early British Cinema."

wish to see a script presented in 'filmic' terms).[52] As such, he postulates that such divergent practice does not represent a lack of cohesion, but rather a political statement on the part of the writers, which may point the way to a different way of conceptualising the film's structure.[53] The script becomes more than a document; it reveals a structure and personality behind such practice. However, the diversity of response from the field can lend an impression of a lack of professionalism. Low's description of screenwriting during the 1930s is typical of this response:

> In the end the competent hack seems to have had the best chance of survival in the British script departments. But an industry which failed to bring to the top people who approached visual story-telling with any originality could only be second-rate. And if the designer was the assassin of the British film's appearance, the hack scenarist was the assassin of its structure.[54]

This is predicated on the notion that visual storytelling was the aim of the writer and the field. With the history of diverse practice in the 1920s, and with a number of discourses competing for dominance, this seems too simplistic a notion. Higson notes that classical Hollywood narrative organisation was not the only pleasure available from British productions in the interwar period:

> Indeed it makes more sense to see *Sing As We Go* not as a narrative film in which comic gags feature as interruptions or inserts, but as a film which is organised around its various attractions, which include the relatively avant-garde practice of montage.[55]

What emerges is a field of diffuse pleasures and aims. While the impact of the Hollywood system, with its connotations of screenwriting as a cinematic, visual storytelling process is to be assessed, it is clear that British screenwriting was comprised of other elements, some of which were resistant to the Hollywood paradigm. When assessing the role of screenwriters and screenwriting in the process of cultural negotiation, two industrial factors must be addressed. The first is that British cinema in the 1930s was a producer's medium, with much of the creative and artistic control lying in the hands of a small number of producers.

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Low, Film Making in 1930s Britain, p.242
[55] Andrew Higson, Waving the Flag, Constructing a National Cinema in Britain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.146

Their relationship with screenwriters affected the individual's creative control. Second, during this period, the role of screenwriters became more clearly defined as production increased, particularly within the studios.

The profession of screenwriting had become diversified and specialised in the late 1920s and early 1930s. There were screen or story writers, who came up with original screen ideas and wrote them in a treatment form, and continuity writers then 'translated' these documents into a shooting script, often to the studio style. The coming of sound gave rise to specialist dialogue writers, while title-writers were phased out. Low notes that 'By 1929, in America at any rate, the business had become highly organised, with a team of readers, adapters, continuity writers, gag men and title writers as well as the scenario editor and his assistants'[56]. These separate roles became more clearly defined in Britain throughout the 1930s, as Hollywood's production techniques were imported through increasing studio investment in the UK. The arrival of sound also demanded more attention be paid to the preparation of the script. This increasing professionalism was cemented in changing writing practice, and institutionalised through the dissipation of screenwriting manuals. Each of these script stages required a writer with different skills and capital. In 1929, Arrar Jackson noted these clear divisions. This final script is for use in the editing suite:

> This final script (i.e. the scenario plus all the directorial notes after the picture has been photographed) is known as the 'continuity'. And cutter plus continuity are, or should be, the producer's safeguard that a man has not walked out of a door with a bowler hat in one shot, and walked from the next door on the other side complete with a tapper in the next.[57]

Each stage of script development held a different technical role in the production process. In Britain, script development took three main phases: the first outline, the treatment, and the scenario or shooting script.[58] This division of practice in the 1930s required different qualities of the sub-categories which made up the screenwriters. The difference between continuity writing and 'authorship' is made explicit in Margrave's *Successful Film Writing*. Margrave's manual

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[56] Rachael Low, The History of the British Film, 1918-1929 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), p.231

[57] Arrar Jackson, Writing for the Screen (London: A&C Black, 1929), p.70

[58] Andrew Buchanan, Films, The Way of the Cinema (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd., 1932), p.93

demonstrates the progress of *The Ghost Goes West*, from magazine short story, to first treatment and finally the finished continuity. Indeed, the screen credits read: 'Based on a Story by Eric Keown, Film Play by Robert Sherwood, Scenario by Geoffrey Kerr'.

These different jobs: writer, treatment writer and continuity writer, required different levels of technical and creative ability. A letter from Elinor Glyn's solicitors Baker & Narne regarding the commission due to continuity writer Edward Knoblock, outlines the differences between a screenwriter and a continuity writer:

> the writing of the whole or any part of the continuity gives no claim whatsoever to joint authorship. It is purely a technical service, and consists mainly of instructions to the cameraman…this would obviously give that person no rights whatsoever in the copyright of the story…In the notices which appear upon the screen at the beginning of the film, the wording is:- "Story by Elinor Glyn; Screen Adaptation by Elinor Glyn and Edward Knoblock," and this is the true position.[59]

This 'technical service' does not constitute authorship, with the associated symbolic capital, but it is the demonstration of 'technique', gained from the acquisition of cultural capital from education and experience.

These discourses were part of the struggle within the field to distinguish screenwriting as a legitimate form distinct from theatre. This concern recurs in the British manuals, while it is largely absent from their American equivalents. The manuals reinforced such distinctions through discourses of professionalism, and by promoting practices which highlighted cinema's medium specificity.

Locating screenwriting manuals within this context accounts for individual agency within a wider context. By conceptualising screenwriting practice as a social field, the dynamic relationship between the players, external influences, and practices in 1920s and 1930s British cinema can be explored. [60]

The manuals offer an insight into these developments. A key benefit of this model is its flexibility, which allows the incorporation of other theoretical perspectives. I propose incorporating aspects of other theories in order to create a framework for a nuanced understanding of how and why a British screenwriting

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[59] Baker & Narne, "Letter to Edward Knoblock", 23 June 1930, Box 9, The Elinor Glyn Collection, The University of Reading, Reading

[60] Toril Moi, "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture," New Literary History 22.4 Autumn (1991): pp.1017-1049

paradigm emerged in the 1930s. While the following chapters detail the way that the British screenwriting responded to the institutionalisation of industrial forms, it may be useful to ask some questions of this model: what are the boundaries of the field? Who was allowed to participate in the field and why? What is the particular role of screenwriting manuals within this field? What rules or logic govern the field? How and why do certain practices become enshrined? What questions might one ask of the field? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this model?

The field is a common ground with delineated boundaries, to which the existing holders of power regulate new entry. I have defined these boundaries as professional film production in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s. This varied from the large producers, such as Korda's London Film Productions, to smaller producing firms, which may have made only one film before folding. The defining characteristic of this field is that the screenwriter is paid for their work, and the produced film is given a mainstream theatrical release. Because there is an economic motive to production, certain logic and practices dominate the field. I refer in later chapters to amateur film production, a related but distinct field as the economic motivation is removed, and with it the preponderance of certain practices.

In professional film production, an individual cannot simply choose to become a screenwriter. Their work must be purchased or commissioned by those with a position of authority, usually producers. As such, the adherence to certain rules and practices as accepted by the field is vital in order for the writer to gain access to it. This also means that the range of those included within the field is wider in this model than in previous approaches. The role of producers, studios, actors and directors have an impact, as do trends in story theme or structure, the use of particular sets, music or lighting techniques, creating a story around the traits of a particularly 'hot' star and so on.

The field is dynamic, in a state of flux and change. Positions are constantly challenged and negotiated. One of the keys for success is the screenwriter's ability to adapt their strategies and practices to account for these changes in the field. Bourdieu likened cultural production to a field of play, 'a space in which a game takes place, a field of objective relations between

individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake'.[61] The 'stake' in this case is the ability to define normative screenwriting practice; all writers, producers, agents and institutions within this field are struggling to impose their definition of normative practice on the field in order to maximise their own position. The struggle for domination is analogous to playing a game; all players pursue strategies which they feel will give them the best chance of 'winning' (maximising financial and cultural reward) depending on the conditions of the field. Factors external to the field are refracted according to the particular logic of the field and influence it according to these rules.[62] For example, the coming of sound to British cinema was an external factor which had an impact on the constitution of the field. When sound became institutionalised, screenwriters reacted to the change by adopting strategies they felt would best serve their position: some embraced the Hollywood doctrine of sound production, while others rejected it, outlining alternative uses. Fields are not simply theoretical constructions, but are based on empirical research and ethnographic data which identify areas of struggle.

With the increased demand for new writers to enter the field, professionals from other fields were recruited. Journalists, novelists and theatre writers came to write for the British screen. Jeanie MacPherson illustrates the field's preference for writers with an existing cache of cultural capital

> Do not feel mistreated if a company turns down your story, and then accepts one by Sir J.M. Barrie or Elinor Glyn that doesn't seem to you any better than yours. The scenario editor may have agreed that your story was just as good, but the advertising value of Sir J.M. Barrie's or Mrs. Glyn's name is much greater than yours, and, other things being equal, they buy the famous author's story in preference.[63]

Barrie and Glyn gained their reputation writing 'legitimate' literary output. Their legitimacy is transferred into the screenwriting field, and can be utilised as a means of selling the final product. While lacking a 'name' may hinder the neophyte screenwriter to begin with, it must be noted that the most famous name lauded in British screenwriting discourses during this period was American

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[61] Pierre Bourdieu, Sociology in Question (London: Sage, 1993), p.197
[62] Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, p.164
[63] Jeannie MacPherson, "The Market for Scenarios," The Picturegoer December 1921: p.40

screenwriter Frances Marion, who gained her reputation exclusively through screenwriting success.

The categories of 'talented writer' and 'competent hack' – one consisting of a select few, the other an undifferentiated mass – constitute two positional poles in 1930s British screenwriting. This field is hypothetically charted in figure 1. Bourdieu defines such a field as a competitive system of social relations, operating under rule specific to that field. These can be economic, cultural, social or any other set of rules. The field functions homologously, in that agents take positions in the field, and engage in competition for control of the interests and resources specific to that field.[64] Bourdieu describes the literary field as,

> Neither a vague social background nor even a *milieu artistique* like a universe of personal relations between artists and writers (perspectives adopted by those who study 'influences'). It is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted. The universe is the place of entirely specific struggles, notably concerning the question of knowing who is a part of the universe, who is a real writer and who is not.[65]

According to this view, the screenwriting field is best envisaged as a two-dimensional metaphorical arena of cultural reception, in which the dominant works, screenwriters and genres are constellated at a given historical moment.[66]

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[64] Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, p.6
[65] Ibid., p.163-164
[66] Marty Hipsky, "Romancing Bourdieu: A Case Study in Gender Politics in the Literary Field," in eds. Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman, Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p.191

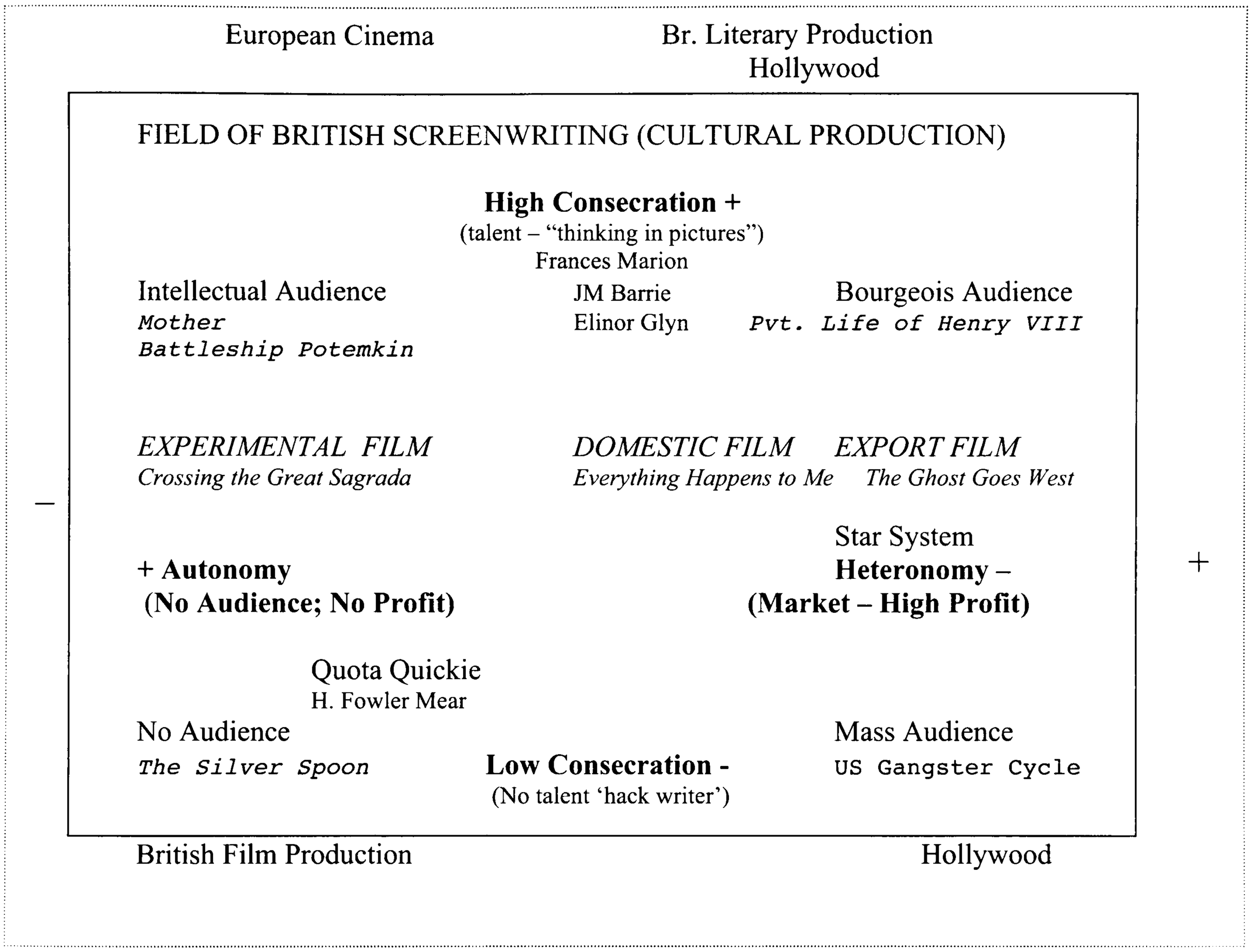

Fig 1. Hypothetical Configuration of the Screenwriting Field of Cultural Production in Britain, 1927-1938

+ = positive pole, implying a dominant position, - = negative pole, implying a dominated position

The field of British screenwriting is a subset of a wider field of power. The discourses and practices of European Cinema, British literary production and Hollywood cinema constitute the wider context within which British screenwriting practice is formed. Writers and texts can also cross into the screenwriting field, often bringing with them capital earned in the larger field. While influenced by these wider fields of power, the field of British screenwriting is semi-autonomous, and functions by its own set of rules. During the 1930s, the 'rules' of classical Hollywood infiltrated the British screenwriting field, which caused a shift in the perception and values of that field.

Two axes form the hypothetical configuration of the field: the horizontal axis measures the relative popularity and profitability of a given work, writer or genre. Relative positions represent their economic capital, and within this context, their commercial success. The broad generic difference for a film would run left to right along this axis, from a low profit experimental film (e.g. Adrian Brunel's experimental burlesques, such as *Crossing the Great Sagrada* [1924]), to a film intended for domestic release (e.g. the Max Miller vehicle *Everything Happens to Me* [1938, dir. Roy William Neill]), to a high budget film intended for export release (e.g. Alexander Korda's *The Ghost Goes West* [1935 dir. Rene Clair]).

The vertical axis measures the relative prestige of the writer, work or genre in question. Bourdieu calls this form of prestige 'symbolic capital', a figurative form of capital which equates to recognition within the screenwriting field. Symbolic capital is perhaps the most important form of capital in Bourdieu's theoretical standpoint. Neither a writer's scripts, nor their manuals, nor their films, nor their social connections can function as valuable unless they are perceived as valuable by the individuals and groups who form the rest of the screenwriting field.[67] Symbolic capital is dependant on constant affirmation and acknowledgment by the field, and is not permanently inherent in the individuals who hold it, but rather it exists in a dialectic relationship with the field that grants it. Positions at the top of the field are held by those consecrated by the field as 'talented': screenwriters such as Frances Marion, Elinor Glyn and J.M. Barrie;

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[67] Ibid., p.192

films such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* [1933 dir. Alexander Korda], which was both a financial success, and won symbolic recognition in the form of an Academy Award; and films held as prestigious but which were not financial successes – the work of the Russian filmmakers lauded by The Film Society. At the bottom of this axis are the writers, works and genres not considered to hold prestige: the 'hack writer' (e.g. H. Fowler Mear, who wrote hundreds of low-budget quota scripts for Twickenham Films), the quota quickie, and the financially successful but symbolically low films such as the American 'B' movie gangster cycle.

The structure of the screenwriting field is dynamic and evolving as a matrix of subjective perceptions, power relations and objectified embodiments of capital. Although complex, the screenwriting field does take its structure through the identifiable exertions of individual and collective actions. Not only do screenwriters compete through their strategies to improve their relative positions in the field, they also 'struggle' for the opportunity to 'break into' the field in the first place, to stake a claim of being a 'real' writer.

Such 'struggle' returns us to the case in hand. The emergence of a British screenwriting paradigm can be understood as a strategy employed - on both an individual and collective basis - to improve writers position within the British screenwriting field. What was valued: financial success or prestige? Was writing a script intended for export more highly valued than writing an experimental film for an intellectual audience? While the economic power of Hollywood production threatened to impose its own, economic logic on the British field, the British screenwriting paradigm was a strategy employed to foreground other values within the screenwriting field.

Such a diagram is, of course, an oversimplification of the state of the field, and it can be reductive. Several provisos must be added. The essence of the field model is that it is dynamic. A new film's success or failure affects the field's understanding of good practice. Fashion, taste, the emergence of a new star, innovation and debate all influence how each writer, producer, and institution relates to each other, and how they understand 'good' practice. A static diagram cannot account for the fluid nature of the field. However, it does provide a straightforward snapshot of the field at any one instance, and visually

represents its complexity and diversity. Notice the similarities between the diagrammatic representation of the field model, and Robert McKee's story triangle (fig.2).[68] This triangle only considers formal properties of stories, but is similar in structure and intent to a diagrammatic representation of the field, and could easily include writers and genres within its boundaries. McKee argues that all elements of screenwriting design must fall within the boundaries of the story triangle, stating that, 'although the variations of event design are innumerable, they are not without limits. The far corners of the art create a triangle of formal possibilities that maps the universe of stories'.[69] By structuring the limits in a triangle, McKee reveals his own habitus: he places the classical plot in a position of prominence, and describes it as the 'archplot', in the sense of 'eminent above others of the same kind'.[70]

The Story Triangle

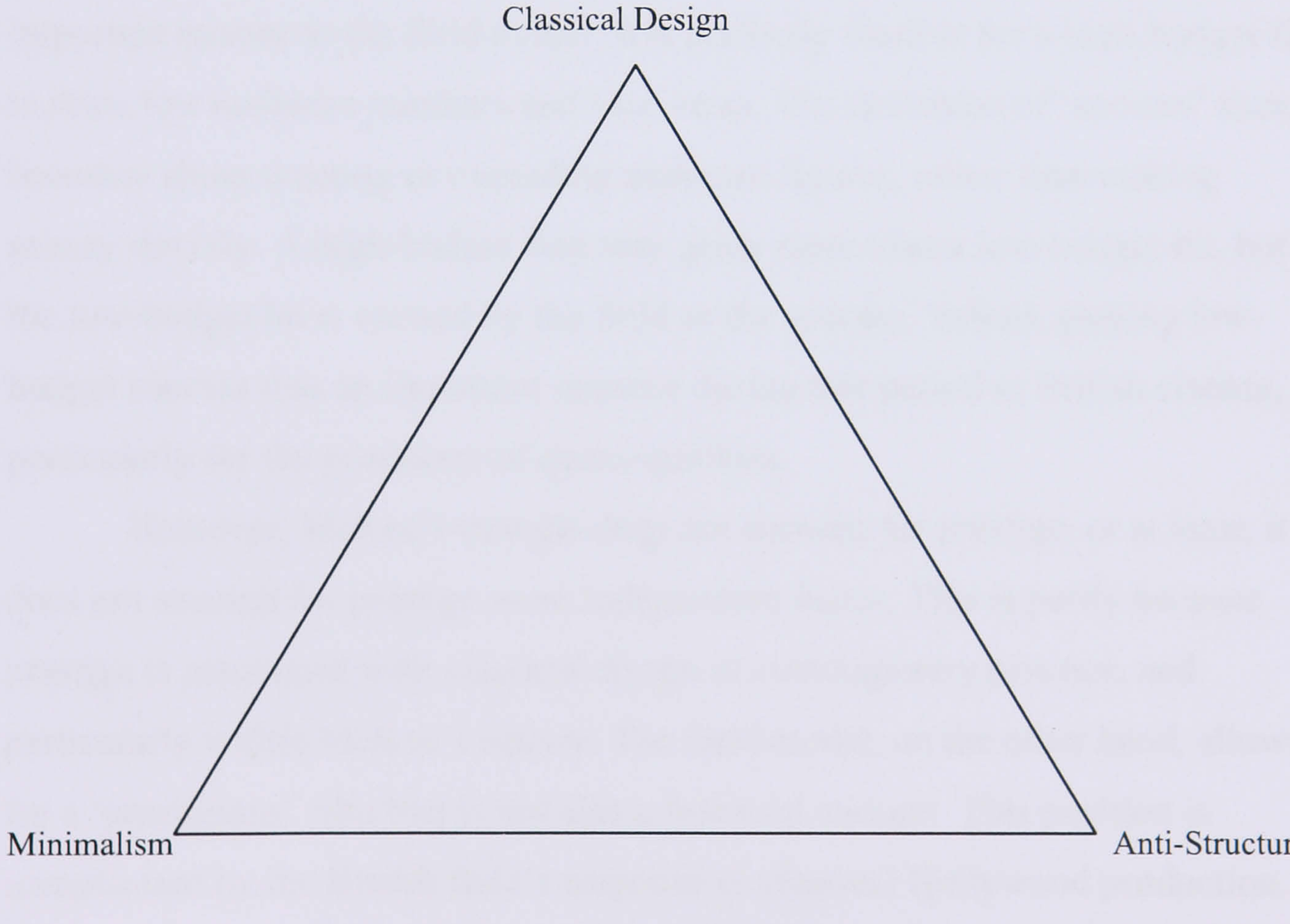

Fig. 2. The Story Triangle. Robert McKee, Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting, (London, Methuen: 1999), p.45

McKee defines the properties of each variation thus:

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[68] McKee, Story, p. 45
[69] Ibid., p.44
[70] Ibid., p.45

Classical Design	Minimalism	Anti-Structure
Causality	Open Endings	Coincidence
Closed Ending	Internal Conflict	Nonlinear Time
Linear Time	Multi-Protagonist	Inconsistent Realities
External Conflict	Passive Protagonist	
Single Protagonist		
Consistent Reality		
Active Protagonist[71]		

To anti-structure, I would add non-narrative films, many of which came out of the variety and music hall tradition, and were a regular feature of British cinema in the 1930s. Like the field model, the vertical axis represents economic capital, running from financial obscurity at the bottom, to economic reward at the top. However, McKee does not refer to this axis in purely financial terms, rather, in terms of audience: 'As story design moves away from the Archplot and down the triangle towards the far reaches of Miniplot, Antiplot and Non-plot, *the audience shrinks*'.[72] Measuring audience rather than money along this axis adds an important nuance to the field model. It is perfectly feasible for a high-budget film to draw low audience numbers and vice versa. The definition of 'success' then, becomes about meeting or exceeding audience figures, rather than making money directly. A high-budget flop may gross more than a low-budget hit, but the low-budget hit is viewed by the field as the success. Indeed, gaining low-budget success was an important impulse during this period in British cinema, particularly for the producers of quota-quickies.

However, McKee's triangle does not account for prestige, or at least, it does not account for prestige as an independent factor. This is partly because prestige is associated with classical design in contemporary practice, and particularly within McKee's oeuvre. The field model, on the other hand, allows for a 'prestigious' film that is not also a financial success. This position is complicated by the British field's response to classical Hollywood production. From certain quarters (particularly those associated with the Film Society and the publication *Close Up*), all Hollywood production was perceived as an industrial form which carried no pretence of art or prestige. In his writing on industrial art,

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[71] Ibid. p.45
[72] Ibid., p.62 Original emphasis.

Bourdieu reveals his belief in the reversal of economic logic, which is problematic in this context. [73] This reversal, described as 'disinterestedness', equates to a negative correlation between financial success and artistic merit, and was shared by some in the British field. They laid claims to a filmmaking paradigm which situated film production as authentic art, and rejected the mass appeal and financial success of Hollywood. However, others in the British field had a bifurcated view of Hollywood production, situating some production as part of the industrial process, while imbuing specific writers, practitioners and films with symbolic capital within the context of industrial production.

The nature of industrial filmmaking meant that success was linked to financial return: a successful film lead to increased economic capital as well as to increased prestige. Frances Marion was cited by British manuals as the prime example of a successful screenwriter. She won Academy Awards for Best Adapted Screenplay in 1930, and for Best Story in 1932. She earned prestige and financial success. Indeed, one important development in the emergence of a British screenwriting paradigm was defining how screenwriters could write interesting stories within the confines of industrial production.

The advantage of the field model is that it allows an objective investigation into how a British screenwriting paradigm emerged from the field as a strategy within a site of struggle.[74] This paradigm was formed by the distinctions made by individuals and by the field. Screenwriting manuals form part of the individual author's strategy to maximise their position, and part of the field's discourses that made distinctions of quality, and allocated prestige. If prestige was valued by the field, to whom was it allocated and why? This is linked to the mechanisms which allow neophytes entry to the field in the first instance.

Screenwriting manuals outlined the two qualities the neophyte had to possess in order to gain entry to the field. The first was the acquisition of technical knowledge demanded by the medium. The screenplay is, in part, a technical document and understanding the technical limitations of the filmmaking process was understood to be essential in order to write a screenplay.

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[73] Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, pp.74-76

[74] Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (London: Harvard University Press, 1987)

Technical aspects define the limits of the medium at the time. They included definitions of camera positions, different types of transition, and how sound or dialogue should be used. These elements equip the neophyte with the vocabulary of screenwriting, so that they may understand how these norms, codified on the page, might be imagined as pictures in the mind, or envisaged in a future version onscreen. The technical elements also define how a screenplay should appear on the page. Industrially accepted formatting allows the reader to understand how the printed word should be interpreted to create a visual image.[75] This body of knowledge was referred to as 'technique', and consisted of normative practices as understood by each manual writer. The manuals stressed the need for technique to be not just understood, but physically absorbed by the aspirant writer. Brunel notes that:

> Before you can do anything really good and approaching great, you must get this technique business over and work it well into your blood. It's no good feeling you have great ideas if you cannot present them intelligently; it's just too bad if, having a great design for a grand piece of architecture, the house falls down. So do not be impatient; learn everything you can about the technique of making pictures, from editing downwards, and practise, practise and again practise.[76]

Screenwriting manuals locate themselves as a repository for such technique. By accurately representing the field, the manual should equip the neophyte with the technical competence to produce a screenplay to the field's accepted technical standards. The acquisition of technique was represented as the minimum requirement for those aspiring to enter the field.

Standardised technical language creates distinctions between those who belong in the field, and those who do not. The reader reads a screenplay, and depending on their understanding of the technical and formal norms of the industry, and the writer's ability to utilise those norms, the reader creates a pictorial version of the written screenplay in their head; an imagined cinematic adaptation based on the screenplay. The reader then makes distinctions of quality based upon their own dispositions. The screenwriting manual is one element which forms those dispositions.

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[75] For a discussion of how this process works, see Ian W. MacDonald, "Finding the Needle - How Readers see Screen Ideas " Journal of Media Practice 4.1 March (2003)
[76] Adrian Brunel, Film Production (London: Newnes, 1936), p.3

However, the field also demanded that in order to be successful within the field, the screenwriter must possess something more nebulous. Several manuals describe it as the ability 'to think in pictures'. The discourses describe such talent either as innate, or not possessed at all. While an individual might be able to learn the normative technical practices of screenwriting, success lies in the possession of this prestigious, symbolic ability. It is represented by the industry as something 'innate' or 'natural'; something that cannot necessarily be taught (unlike the technical and formal aspects). The kind of stories the individual tells, the selection and ordering of story events is described as 'thinking in pictures'.

However, what this actually means is never adequately described by the field. It appears to mean the ability to conceptualise a filmic story in pictorial terms rather than verbal. If technique is so expertly described, how is the other principle, 'talent', negotiated between manual and reader? The cinema, the manuals imply, requires a new way of thinking, of speaking, in order to tell your story. In his manual, Margrave states that, 'to visualize a film in detail – even when the detail is set down on paper – is a most difficult mental process, demanding the preconception of an intricate sequence of images and sounds'.[77] Similarly, Jackson notes that a screenwriter is, 'a man who can give infinite attention to detail, who has acquired a knowledge of production routine, who knows just what a camera will take and what it will not, and who has a mind that can "think" in pictures'.[78] This description of talent as an alternative way of thinking establishes a plausible distinction between those who can do it, and those who cannot. Such talent is mythologised, as illustrated by Dryhurst:

> **Eddie Dryhurst:** Well writing had always come easily to me, I liked writing. I was much happier writing than talking. I wanted to be a writer, a screenwriter, I liked writing movies. Although I didn't have writing as such in Hollywood, I wanted to, I did a lot of publicity writing, you know magazine articles and that sort of thing, even in America. But they offered me this job and I took it gladly because I thought that it would open the door to me as a writer.
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> **Roy Fowler:** So you hadn't done writing on spec?

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[77] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.3
[78] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.72

Eddie Dryhurst: No, no.

Roy Fowler: So how did you, as it were, learn the craft of screen writing? By observation and...?

Eddie Dryhurst: It came naturally to me.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: I could think in pictures.[79]

'Thinking in pictures' represents a measure of capital which Dryhurst tacitly acknowledges cannot be taught or learned; it is simply 'talent'. He did not study the craft; he simply 'knew' how to write for the screen.[80] Allen describes success as a combination of technique and imagination:

> The screen as a medium for dramatic expression has not yet made a universal appeal to writers and would-be writers. The technique which must be mastered before a scenario (which is the professional term for a film play) can be written is of an utterly different kind to that which applies to any other form of story-telling, and the mere sight of a correctly written scenario would fill the hearts of the uninitiated with awe and wonderment…Once a grip of the rudiments of this form of story-making is secured, anyone who has imagination enough to create the kind of story that screens well, could turn that story into a film play…The screen tells its stories in actions, not words, and there are many people who can think out a good story, and put it on paper in a lucid fashion who are not yet good enough writers to tell stories in the novel form.[81]

However, Bourdieu argues that 'talent' is not in fact a form of 'magic' or 'gift', but the misrecognition of other forms of capital which serves to maintain the structures dominant in the field. The field recognises as legitimate the values and practices of those screenwriters who are able to meet its demands. Thus, a failed writer accepts their failure because they believe they cannot 'think in pictures'. Equally, they accept the success of established writers not as a function of

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[79] Roy Fowler, Interview with Eddie Dryhurst, 1988, BECTU Oral History Project, - Interview 36, http://easbchrp2.eas.uea.ac.uk:8080/interviews/atod/dryhurst/view?searchterm=dryhurst June 20 2007

[80] Walter Mycroft described Alfred Hitchcock as, 'the first I had met to be endowed with a completely cinematic mind, to see films as a flow of moving images which must always be significant'. Walter C. Mycroft, The Time of My Life: The Memoirs of a British Film Producer, ed. Vincent Porter (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), p.31

[81] Gertrude Allen, How to Write a Film Story (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926), pp.9-10

economics, cultural or social capital, but because the established writers possess the 'talent' that they themselves do not. In a self-fulfilling delusion, the fact that the successful are successful demonstrates their talent; anyone who gets to the top of the profession does so due to the value of their 'talent', not as a function of other forms of capital. The screenwriting manual, with its distinction between 'technique' which can be acquired, and 'talent' which cannot, contributes to this understanding.

It is impossible to write about British screenwriting – or indeed British cinema – during this period without acknowledging the influence of Hollywood over the industry. Hollywood production was not just economically and culturally dominant. In terms of screenwriting, the classical Hollywood paradigm was the epitome of an organised screenwriting system that guides screenwriting choice. Compared to its stability, the emergent British screenwriting paradigm appears confused and at times, chaotic. It was in the shadow of the classical Hollywood paradigm that British practice developed, and the influence of the Hollywood paradigm, whether resisted or embraced by the British field, is inescapable.

Certain rules are enshrined in the field as natural and inevitable. Bourdieu refers to such rules as the doxa, a system where the 'established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e. as one possible among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned'.[82] The classical Hollywood paradigm was such an order, with codified screenwriting norms that could be taught and reproduced as 'technique'. These doxic principles did not just constitute a series of story choices and values, but actively supported the economic mode of production that made Hollywood successful. With the increasing economic influence of classical Hollywood in British production during the 1930s, the doxic screenwriting principles which supported this system became more influential. Added to the ubiquitous success of Hollywood films, and the prestige associated with their production, the principles of classical Hollywood appeared to become increasingly natural. These principles are so well entrenched in modern practice that they appear 'self

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[82] Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.166

evident' and 'natural' in contemporary pedagogic texts: Robert McKee refers to the principles of Hollywood classicism as having worked, 'through all remembered time'.[83] However, these doxic principles of classical Hollywood did not go unquestioned in British screenwriting.

Bourdieu's major contribution is in the synthesis of the economic and symbolic orders, which he refers to in his writing as 'symbolic power'. The economic-based relations of dependency and domination are manifested in cultural hierarchies which prevent their very recognition. Because of this, the dominant culture establishes a pattern of distinction, which legitimises such patterns and gives them force. Such a synthesis and reproduction of the economic and symbolic readily applies to film, and particularly to an area such as screenwriting. The practices, personnel and products of Hollywood classicism are established, legitimised and reproduced as symbolic: there is a recognition of a 'right' way to tell a film story that is 'natural' or 'correct', rather than such methods being recognised as the product of economic determination.

The classical Hollywood system was geared towards its dual aims of narrative and profit.[84] In terms of screenwriting and storytelling, Hollywood films generally followed the journey of a single protagonist, whose dramatic choices were explained through psychological motivation, and set into motion a chain of causal action to reach a strongly closed resolution. The way that this was achieved – the technique of classical screenwriting – was disseminated through the practices and discourses of the industry. Further, the result of these practices – the films themselves – provided examples of the success of this storytelling system. This system was not only grounded on a narrative basis, but also an economic one. For example, the economic boon of the star system was exploited through the story preference for following a single protagonist. The stability of the classical Hollywood system allowed it to integrate innovation and new practices. During the integration of sound – an innovation designed to boost flagging sales – dialogue and sound were assimilated into the existing story

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[83] McKee, Story, p.3

[84] Elizabeth Cowie, "Storytelling: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Classical Narrative," in eds. Steve Neale and Murray Smith, Contemporary Hollywood Cinema (London: Routledge, 1998), p.179

values to provide new usage. The stabilising discourses of classical Hollywood disseminated this newly developed technique and the system carried on.

This is not to say that screenwriting in the classical Hollywood mode followed a formula *per se*. While contemporary screenwriting pedagogy is often criticised for promoting 'formulaic' practices, the classical Hollywood system was nothing so rigid as a formula. Rather, it promoted a series of values as preferable when composing a screenplay. These might include rising action, a lack of coincidence, or an upbeat resolution. Taken together, they constitute a screenwriting paradigm in which certain stories, events and organisations are preferred and understood by the field to be 'good'. These practices support the cultural and economic model of classical Hollywood. The success of this cultural and economic paradigm was seen in Britain in the ubiquity of Hollywood films on British screens.

As such, the classical Hollywood paradigm provided a stable and successful doxic base against which British screenwriting practice developed. Despite this, and often because of it, British screenwriters made choices in relation to the existing classical Hollywood paradigm. These preferences reflected the struggle to establish an indigenous system of screenwriting values. Lacking the overarching economic base which stabilised Hollywood screenwriting, the British field attempted to construct their own screenwriting paradigm – a coherent system of choices – to support the values they held to be important. However, without this stability, the manuals, screenwriters, studios, producers and other players in the field each had a different interpretation of these values, and as such, the discourses produced different, divergent and at times confused attempts at authority. The values of classical Hollywood constituted a powerful voice during this time, especially once the Hollywood studios came to Britain and produced films along Hollywood lines.

This framework extends Bourdieu's notion of the social field, while adapting and refining his terminology to explicitly delineate positions and actions within the field of screenwriting in interwar British cinema. Capital, field and doxa are key terms to account for the establishment of normative screenwriting practices, and the negotiation of notions of classicism. To summarise: the field is a network of negotiated actions and relations between

positions, as the players vie for control or influence over the defining normative screenwriting practice. How players participate in this field is determined by capital, which is specific to this field. Screenwriting is a field where economic and symbolic capitals are valued highly. One of the points of contestation is over which form of capital is more valuable: whether screenwriting is an economic activity, an artistic activity, or both. The increasing economic logic of the field challenged British conceptions of practice. Equally, the notion of habitus is defined as a common set of dispositions held by a group, the logic of which defines the logic of the field. Again, the formation of these dispositions was contested throughout the period of study. The emergence of a British screenwriting paradigm can be understood as a strategy employed by British screenwriters in the struggle to maximise their position within the changing field.

While Bourdieu's approach may be, 'the most comprehensive and sophisticated available at present', it is problematic in parts.[85] While the diagrammatic representation of the field can provide a snapshot, there is a danger that the field model is reductive. The researcher makes choices about what is included, and what is not. The availability of data can limit the accuracy of the model. Indeed, the difficulty in discovering and accessing sources is an issue in this thesis.

The field model can be perceived as functionalist, with participants reduced to their roles. The understanding of habitus is particularly important here. An individual's habitus disposes them to act, but does not compel them to do so. Individual agency remains, and individuals can act against the doxic principles of the field. Indeed, accounting for such action is one of the aims of this thesis. Over time, players may adopt different strategies to try to maximise their position. Adapting Mutch's 'line of tension' polarises positions, and places ideologies directly against each other.[86] Margolis criticises Bourdieu for his use of the very binaries he sought to challenge.[87] Frow observes that Bourdieu tends to collapse social groups and experiences into a single group or experience in the

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[85] Bridget Fowler, Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory (London: Sage, 1997), p.1
[86] Carol Mutch, "Adapting Bourdieu's Field Theory to Explain Decision-Making Processes in Educational Psychology," in eds. Vincent Anfara and Norma Mertz, Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research (London: Sage, 2006), p.156
[87] Joseph Margolis, "Habitus and the Logic of Practice," in ed. Richard Shusterman, Bourdieu: A Critical Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp.64-83

interests of arguing for a dominant, field-specific logic.[88] This reductive view leads to a binary construction of 'high' and 'popular' aesthetics, and as such, Bourdieu reproduces the dominant discourses in the field of cultural production. It is difficult to account for wavering or vacillation in a diagrammatic representation. The diagram fixes individuals, whereas it is likely that their true position is more complex and dynamic than such a fixed representation can show, as individuals change positions over time.[89]

However, Bourdieu's writing offers a contextual framework with which to approach this topic. Taken together, his work does not equate to a grand theory, but rather a method: a way of examining societies and asking questions. This method is made up of complex theoretical concepts which can be applied in multiple settings, shaped by empirical research. It is in the gap between the theoretical and the empirical that Bourdieu's sociology of culture resides. The elements of my adaptation of this model are as follows:

1. The field model is used to portray the complex, contextual and contested interactions at a particular time. In this case, the emergence of a British screenwriting paradigm in response to the changing structure of the industry in the 1920s and 1930s.
2. The field can operate at a micro and macro level, and there will be external influences and links to a wider context.
3. The field sits within a context, and this must be adequately described. The social, economic, political and historical factors that lead to the creation of the field are vital in understanding practice generated in it.
4. The reason for the field's existence must be explained: specifically, what is at stake both implicitly and explicitly. In this case, what is at stake is the definition of normative screenwriting practice. What is at stake explicitly is control over how domestic film stories are told. What is at

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[88] John Frow, Cultural Studies and Cultural Value (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
[89] Bohman finds the field model unable to explain social change, while Butler argues that Bourdieu privileges the social field in a way that fails to recognise the opportunities for social transformation. James Bohman, "Practical Reason and Cultural Constraint: Agency in Bourdieu's Theory of Practice," in ed. Richard Shusterman, Bourdieu: A Critical Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), Judith Butler, "Performativity's Social Magic," in ed. Richard Shusterman, Bourdieu: A Critical Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999)

stake implicitly is resisting foreign, specifically American domination of the industry and the cultural life of Britain.

5. How does the field operate? What is its habitus? How are rules, decisions and conflicts negotiated? One of the main tools for describing this operation is by theorising screenwriting manuals. These texts negotiate the various influences of the field to describe such rules, decisions and conflicts as understood by the author; and thus shape and reflect habitus.
6. How are the players positioned? How do they position themselves in relation to each other?

If the field model provides the theoretical platform from which to investigate the emergence of a British screenwriting paradigm, what is my methodological approach? Broadly, I am investigating how British screenwriting manuals aided the negotiation and institutionalisation of industrial forms in the 1930s. What emerges is a series of competing discourses, attempting to define a distinct, British screenwriting paradigm. I propose examining a number of different scripts in the case studies to demonstrate the paradigmatic values present. One of the main ways of delineating the values in an individual script is in the development process, as changes between the script stages often reveal techniques and practices which are preferred at the expense of others. When explicating such a process of adaptation, there is a temptation towards fidelity criticism, which can be unhelpful, particularly in the case of script development within a studio. Cardwell proposed a critical move away from the centre-base adaptation model, which can de-historicise both the process and the text. Rather, she evokes the metaphor of genetic adaptation in recognition of the influence not only of the original text, but also of previous adaptations. Cardwell notes: 'Genetic adaptation can be broadly conceived as a linear process of progression, with each new organism in the chain being genetically (causally) linked to its predecessor, but being nonetheless significantly different from them'.[90] This model is useful when considering the development of story material within the studio system, particularly in the case of script development. It takes account of

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[90] Sarah Cardwell, Adaptation Revisited, Television and the Classical Novel (Manchester: MUP, 2002), p.13

previous versions and ideas which are incorporated within each new rewriting, without the need to revisit the source material, which more closely mirrors practice. Cardwell's notion of adaptation as the gradual unfolding of a meta-text moves away from such issues of fidelity criticism, a concept made redundant by the studios' institutionalised attitude towards story material as a component of production, rather than as a 'sacred' form in its own right. The metaphor of genetic adaptation ascribes changes between versions to the particular conditions of the field in which the rewriting is taking place. Darwin notes that, 'deviations in structure are in some way due to the conditions of life'.[91] Such conditions are specific to the locale of the field. British screenwriting, while influenced by American practice, had its own hierarchy of values, and practices which would account for such 'deviations'. Like Darwin's finches, such deviations can be utilised to differentiate the conditions of the field that produced them. By locating specific instances of practice within the wider context which informed them, the screenwriting paradigm may be revealed.

There is a renewed interest in the cultural and historical determinates of cultural production. While much theory focuses on post-modernism or post-structuralism, Bourdieu's focus on a sociologically-based empirical study grounds work within a discursive framework. An empirical study can determine the individual and social determinants of agency and subjectivity within cultural production, without resorting to theories of 'taste', such as auteurism, which sidelines the study of areas not regarded as worth of entry to the 'canon'. The nature of film production must raise questions of the relative merits of cinema as 'art', and cinema as an economic process. This framework offers a non-reductive method of investigating a cultural history when such questions are addressed. The notions of field, doxa, capital and habitus are key in examining the negotiation of the classical narrative as a dominant screenwriting paradigm in interwar British cinema.

This chapter has located this study within its historical and critical context. While the discipline has struggled to find a theoretical basis with which to examine screenwriting, the field model proposes an empirically grounded,

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[91] Charles Darwin, On the Origins of Species (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), p.131

broad ranging conception. It accounts for both micro- and macro-level changes within the field. As such, the variety of discourses that constituted British cinema during this period can be accounted for, while demonstrating the mechanisms which formed dominant narrative practices within a competing field. Because contemporary normative screenwriting practices are so firmly established, it can be difficult to conceptualise them as anything other than the 'natural' doxic principles they function as today. Dominant amongst these principles is the prevalence of classicism as a screenwriting paradigm. By arguing for an 'unhooking' of the principles of the classical narrative from the principles of classical Hollywood, this thesis can examine how the field negotiated each. Finally, the broader conception of screenwriting manuals as a multi-faceted text which is both structured by, and structures the field will allow for a greater insight into how various discourses compete, and normative practices are established within screenwriting. Part II will take this theoretical position to examine how the field of British screenwriting negotiated the institutionalisation of industrial forms – classical Hollywood, the coming of sound and the star system - and how a British screenwriting paradigm was formed as a result of the individual and collective struggle caused by changes in the field.

Part II

Part II utilises the theoretical perspective outlined in Part I to examine how British screenwriting negotiated its system of values within the changing structure of the industry during this period. The material is divided into three sections: story composition, the star system, and sound. To a certain extent, these are arbitrary distinctions with which to examine the field's response to the changing structure of the industry. Boundaries are rarely so clearly defined, and there were, of course, overlaps between these areas. This is particularly true when comparing British screenwriting to classical Hollywood practice. The formation of the classical Hollywood narrative integrated story composition, the star system and sound into a 'holy-trinity' of story values, so that each value was both independent from, and intertwined with, the others. However, it must also be noted that the manuals and other discourses in Britain addressed these areas as distinct at the time.

I begin this section with Story Composition. While the star system and the coming of sound have a great impact on how screen stories were conceptualised and written, this section broadly defines the existing story and storytelling values which British screenwriting was struggling to define as a definitive, workable paradigm of use. As I will show, integrating the star system and sound further complicated this negotiation.

Each section comprises two chapters. The first outlines the manuals' response to the changing industrial situation. While usually avoiding high aesthetic theory, the manuals propose craft theory: a theory of screenwriting. These responses challenged the shifting industrial vista and other competing storytelling paradigms. The second chapter in each section moves from craft theory to craft practice, and examines how working British screenwriters attempted to negotiate these demands, and attempts to trace instances where craft theory proposed in the manuals and other discourses is (or is not) followed in practice. The field model can include a large area of study, where any number of practices, people and organisations affect the formation of normative practices. In recognition of these diverse influences, the case study chapters focus on different types of people and organisations which moulded the way that

screenwriters operated in this field of struggle. These include the realities of working under an American producer in an American studio outpost producing for quota-quickies; the impact of accommodating a star image; and the changing fortunes of one screenwriter. In doing so, Part II accounts for the diversity of discourses and experiences within the field as individuals and organisations struggled to define the normative rules of screenwriting. The first question to ask is: what are the rules, values and practices which influence story composition?

Chapter 3. 'Writing a Good Story': Story Construction, Classicism and Screenwriting Manuals

> Somebody or other in the world of letters laid it down that if your story had a beginning, a middle, and an end, it was a good story.[1]
>
> Norman Lee, Money for Film Stories (1937)

Screenwriters begin with a blank sheet of paper. The way they build their story depends on their understanding the 'good' craft and story practices required to write a 'good' screen story. The increasing influence of American production practices in Britain during the 1930s brought a clash of screenwriting paradigms, and different versions of what the screenwriter had to do in order to write a 'good' story. American screenwriting practice was grounded in the stable style of the classical Hollywood 'package', with craft and story practices defined within the broad boundaries of the studio system.[2] This contrasted with paradigms of storytelling extant within British screenwriting practice in the 1930s. Gledhill notes that the concept of 'story', distinct from both the literary tradition and the format of Hollywood production, was the prime value within British cinema in the 1920s.[3] During the 1930s, story continued to be a primary value, although other values emerged as the field attempted to formulate legitimate writing practice. Grounded in a broadly Aristotelian conception of classical narrative, the dominant British screenwriting paradigm was based on story unity, which gives the impression of economy, efficiency and closure. While its history was traced – often overtly – through the literary tradition, efforts were made to distinguish British practice as uniquely cinematic, and distinct from theatrical and novelistic forms. Such a clean separation was problematic, particularly as many British screenwriters began their careers in the theatre, and continued to work in both mediums throughout this period. Further, many of the story properties acquired by the producing firms in Britain were adaptations of literary works. These carried with them the cultural capital associated with 'legitimate' forms of

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[1] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.30
[2] Cowie, "Storytelling: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Classical Narrative," p.182
[3] Gledhill, Reframing British Cinema, pp.151-177

writing, which screenwriting as a discipline had yet to acquire. While writing adaptations was a key part of British screenwriting during the 1930s, many manuals rejected these literary foundations in favour of original screen compositions. Buchanan argues that, 'The astounding thing is that nobody appears to realise that the film is absolutely incapable of expressing literature in any form'.[4] However, these distinctions were not always successful, and associations between literature and film were contested by the field. This literary basis for screen stories either represented a source of cultural capital, grounded in the literary tradition, or an outdated and uncinematic mode of practice. The forging of a distinct, 'writerly' practice was a struggle against oppression by the cultural weight of the literary tradition, and the economic might of classical Hollywood. In addition, the diversity of British screenwriting theory incorporated 'other important impulses', such as the traditions of the variety and music hall, which classical Hollywood often ignored.[5] In particular, Soviet montage theory became influential amongst the avant-garde British writers and theorists. Within these competing storytelling paradigms, screenwriters and manual authors sought to establish notions of quality and a hierarchy of values within the field. British screenwriting was forced to confront these screenwriting paradigms in theory and in practice in order to establish what it meant to 'write a good screen story'.

This negotiation was articulated in theory by the screenwriting manuals of the day, and in practice by the British screenwriters, often working within the American-owned studios in Britain. This brought British screenwriters into direct contact and conflict with the monolithic classical Hollywood paradigm, dominant in theory and in practice. American manuals of the time promoted a narrative organisation of a stable storytelling practice based on the 'package' of classical Hollywood, and in particular character value and motivation. British manuals were grounded in an Aristotelian classical narrative, although they incorporated other important elements of practice – including elements of classical Hollywood – to create a distinct indigenous practice with 'story'

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[4] Andrew Buchanan, The Art of Film Production (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd., 1936), p.38

[5] Dirk Eitzen, "Evolution, functionalism and the study of the American cinema," The Velvet Light Trap 28 Fall (1991): p.80

prominent amongst a variety of values. British screenwriting theory and practice cannot be understood without reference to the overshadowing presence of Hollywood. The classical Hollywood paradigm provided a standard – in terms of quality and stability – which British screenwriters had to match or bypass in order to fulfil their goal of 'writing a good story'. How this notion of quality story composition was created in theory is the focus of this chapter; examining its deployment in practice is the aim of chapter 4.

This chapter will examine how the screenwriting field negotiated the competing influences of classical Hollywood, classical narrative and other screenwriting paradigms during the years of the quota in order to produce a distinct practice. This determined how notions of quality and a hierarchy of values were established in theory and in practice. These competing demands were expressed within the field as a tension between the formal demands of classical Hollywood's technical and storytelling mode of production, and the 'writerly' influence of classical narrative. This results in the forging of 'quality' indigenous practice as the field navigates between a number of competing story paradigms. This chapter will investigate the politics of quality associated with story composition, and offer a re-assessment of British screenwriting as a product in cultural negotiation with classical Hollywood, classical narrative and other narrative impulses, rather than as a product to be judged exclusively by the standards of classical Hollywood. It will examine how and why a hierarchy of composition values was created and maintained. It begins by exploring British screenwriting manuals' negotiation of classicism, quality and value within their specific locale, how it was articulated, and the differences in script practice. This is followed in chapter 4 by a case study of how the story value was negotiated in practice under the quota and within the American-owned Warner Brothers-First National studio at Teddington. It is instructive to begin by examining the context in which this struggle took place.

The legacy of the 1927 Cinematograph Act is inevitably linked to notions of quality, specifically, the (lack of) quality in the resultant British films. The advent of sound and the spread of quota systems in Europe made the British market increasingly important for Hollywood producers. They were willing to make low-budget British films, produced or financed by a British subsidiary,

which were distributed along with the parent company's American film in order to meet the standards of the quota.[6] The studios acquired some of the footage required from British production companies, many of which 'mushroomed up' to meet the initial demand in the early 1930s. This was insufficient to meet the demands of the Act. Several American studios established their own production base in Britain. Fox British Pictures was established in July 1932; Paramount British Productions was registered in July 1931, although after 1932, British and Dominion would produce around one film per month for Paramount; Warner Brothers – First National Productions was registered in August 1932 and began production at Teddington studios.[7] This brought an influx of producers and technicians from Hollywood, while the resultant British productions fell under the critical purview of studio chiefs in California and under the financial oversight of New York. Thus classical Hollywood's stable, unified mode of practice, globally dominant since the 1920s through popularity of the product, arrived in Britain in production as well as in practice. My aim is not to mount a defence of the quota-quickie; that battle has been eloquently fought by revisionist historians.[8] Rather, my interest is untangling the different paradigms and discourses which the quota brought together in British screenwriting. Screenwriting manuals act as a locus for the field's negotiation of these discourses, and point towards the establishment of a more 'writerly' story value than was acceptable in the industrial form of classical Hollywood.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the British screenwriting field's conception of dramatic construction was primarily based – explicitly or implicitly – on Aristotelian principles of unity. As early as 1923, Colden Lore's manual traces the history of dramatic construction back in time through the epic.[9] Thompson and Salt have demonstrated the influence of the theatre-based model

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[6] H. Mark Glancy, "Hollywood and Britain: MGM and the British 'Quota' Legislation," in ed. Jeffrey Richards, The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative Histoy of the British Cinema, 1929-1939 (London: IB Taurus, 1998), p.60

[7] Low, Film Making in 1930s Britain, pp.186-197

[8] cf. Steve Chibnall, 'Quota-Quickies': The Birth of the British 'B' Film (London: BFI, 2007), Linda Wood, "Low Budget Production and the British Film Industry, with Particular Reference to Julius Hagen and Twickenham Film Studios, 1927-1938," MPhil, Polytechnic of Central London, 1989, Lawrence Napper, "A Despicable Tradition? Quota-Quickies in the 1930s," in ed. Robert Murphy, The British Cinema Book (London: BFI, 2003)

[9] Colden Lore, The Modern Photoplay and its Construction (London: Chapman & Dodd, 1923), p.12

of the well-made play on early American practice, which later developed into classical Hollywood production.[10] However, Aristotelian principles of dramatic construction continue to underpin British screenwriting theory in the 1920s and 1930s, while American dramatic construction was based on the stable system of classical Hollywood.

The British manuals promoted a screenwriting paradigm based upon the classical narrative notion of Aristotelian unity. *Poetics* describes three aspects: unity of time, unity of place and unity of action. Jackson utilises these terms in conceptualising the 'plot', which, 'needs going over very carefully to see that there are no flaws in the matters of time, place or action'.[11] However, unity of place and unity of time were largely disregarded by cinematic practitioners who did not confine their dramas to a single setting within a twenty-four hour period, as proposed by Aristotle.[12] British manuals maintained unity of action as a primary value. It was characterised by the deployment of narrative resources with economy, closure and wholeness. Stories which adhere to unity of action have a strong sense of internal completeness.

This is achieved principally through the economical deployment of narrative events. Such a narrative organisation minimises redundancy, and maximises the functionality of narrative information presented.[13] Aristotle stated that all narrative events should be 'necessary or probable', and that 'the structure of the various sections of the events must be such that the transposition or removal of any one section dislocates and changes the whole'.[14] Taken to the extreme, this means that every utterance – every instance of dialogue or movement – should contain some significance in progressing the story. In practical terms, the notion of economy is best illustrated by Chekhov's gun: 'if in the first chapter you say that a gun hung on the wall, in the second or third

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[10] Barry Salt, Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis (London: Starwood, 1983), Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema

[11] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.39

[12] However, some restrictions appear to have been self-imposed on British conceptualisation of narrative mobility, which is illustrated in script format, discussed below.

[13] N.J. Lowe, The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp.62-63

[14] Aristotle, Poetics, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p.15

chapter it must without fail be discharged'.[15] Such organisation increases the sense of completeness, particularly at the end, as all the narrative information required for the denouement has already been presented previously, and will inevitably be utilised. As such, the 'untangling' of the narrative problem is always precipitated by a character or story event extant within the narrative. The story is internally complete, and does not require additional narrative information in order to reach the end.[16]

The notion of economic writing developed in British screenwriting during this period. A complaint levelled at British screenwriting was of the emphasis on 'pictorial quality' – the use of the screen in order maximise cinema's capability to 'show' images, but which did not further the story. Allen's 1926 manual argues for the implementation of such a strategy: 'Now you have a chance, in such a situation as this, to introduce one of those subtle touches which are not actually necessary to the furtherance of the story, and yet lend it an added touch of reality'.[17] However, by the late 1920s and into the 1930s, other manual writers were positioning themselves against such practice as being uneconomical. Margrave states that, 'The film writer must space his action. He cannot dwell on asides. He must keep to the main shaft of his plot or theme'.[18] Such advice begins to differentiate screenwriting from other aspects of literary production, and locates it firmly within the classical narrative maxim of economy. Jackson notes the specific requirements when writing for the medium:

> It is quite simple when writing a novel, or even a short story, to digress, to depart from the theme for a while and indulge in a little atmosphere-building or something else which will cover a few more pages; but in a film-play this must not be done. It may sound a surprising statement to make, but there is not too much room in seven or eight thousand feet of film to put across a good story adequately. Further, the audience watching the film are having their thoughts and imagination directed along certain channels by what they see on the screen, and a digression completely diverts their attention and breaks the spell.[19]

Such digression breaks the artifice of the medium and reveals the construction of the narrative world. The maintenance of the story illusion is central to the

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[15] Samuel S. Koteliansky, ed., Anton Tchekhov: Literary and Theatrical Reminiscences (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1927), p.23
[16] Typified by the *deus ex machina*, so loathed by Robert McKee. cf. McKee, Story, pp.357-358
[17] Allen, How to Write a Film Story, p.36
[18] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.4
[19] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, pp.23-24

classical narrative's tenet of internal completeness. Screenwriting practice which incorporates classical narrative's economy must utilise story events in a multifaceted manner. As Jackson notes, atmosphere-building is important, but pressures of economy mean that it must be built by deploying narrative resources in such a way as to support story progression. Brunel suggested the writer ask themselves a series of questions to determine the economy of each sequence:

> (a) Is my sequence too long or too short?
> (b) Is it plausible?
> (c) Is it entertaining or interesting?
> (d) Does it flow smoothly?
> (e) And if you don't want ordinary smoothness, has it rhythm or dramatic significance in its roughness?
> (f) Does it end at the right point and on the right note?
> (g) Has it progressed your theme or your story?'[20]

This advice encouraged the screenwriter to think carefully about the use and deployment of story resources as a small unit, and in relation to its place in the story as whole. Such practical advice encouraged the paradigmatic value of economy, as the utility of every utterance was to be considered. Question (g) also supported the idea of constant progression and forward movement as key to narrative construction. The constraints of writing for the screen led to the development of a screenwriting shorthand, in which narrative information is quickly conveyed to the audience. Such a shorthand was institutionalised in British screenwriting, particularly in the use of transitions in order to prepare the audience for the narrative movement which follows. Margrave writes that, 'generally it may be said that the Dissolve marks a physical movement from one setting to another, while the Fade indicates a change of setting plus a change of thought'.[21] Jackson argues that 'the mix' is used for minor time lapses, the fade bridges longer time lapses and the culmination of minor climaxes.[22] Buchanan's *Film Making* has a list of technical terms including transitions, but attaches technical, not story significance to their use; Brunel advocates the use of wipes and dissolves in 'tightening up slow-moving parts of a film'.[23] This advice

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[20] Adrian Brunel, Film Craft, The Art of Picture Production (London: George Newnes Ltd., 1933), p.67
[21] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.11
[22] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, pp.87-98
[23] Brunel, Film Production, p.43

contributes to the emergence of a story style grounded in classical narrative notions of economy, but achieved through the codification of technical excellence. While classical Hollywood demonstrates several aspects of this sense of unity, the overriding narrative impulse is as part of the 'package', and as such, classical Hollywood breaks some aspects of these unities.

The difference between American and British screenwriting practice is clearly demonstrated in how they instruct their reader to begin formulating the screen idea. Put simply, American manuals begin with character, while British manuals begin with story.[24] This difference delineates the narrative paradigm within which the screenplay is conceptualised, and illustrates a different system of values within the organisation of narrative material. Further, it can demonstrate the disparity between the 'writerly', and technical aspects demanded by different paradigms of classicism. Efforts to incorporate or resist aspects of the classical Hollywood paradigm directly reflected how the British field thought of its own practice. Such differences were often attributed to national characteristics, rather than to a different understanding of screenwriting principles, and recur throughout the British screenwriting manuals of the 1930s.

Narrative organisation in classical Hollywood is based on the centrality of character. This maxim is articulated through the manuals and other discourses of the 1930s. M.L. Gunzburg recalled his early days writing at Metro, where, 'Dramaturgy was the code. You understood character and by character I mean you're in the tradition of the prior century. Rules established back at the time of Shakespeare, and so forth, going back to the Greeks'.[25] He highlights the importance of character, and links this importance to the classical narrative tradition. Frances Marion was widely regarded as one of the best screenwriters in Hollywood. She was acknowledged as such in Britain by Norman Lee and Seton Margrave in their screenwriting manuals, both of which make explicit reference to Marion's expertise. Indeed, Margrave refers directly to the importance she places on character in his own screenwriting advice.[26] Marion's acknowledged

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[24] Contemporary screenwriting pedagogy argues that story and character are inseparable: story is only revealed when the character acts; the character is not revealed until he acts. cf. McKee, Story, p.100

[25] Douglas Bell, "An Oral History with M.L. Gunzburg", 1994, OH115, Oral History Program, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, p.16

[26] Lee, Money for Film Stories , Margrave, Successful Film Writing

status within the British field, along with the British publication and advertisement of her manual in 1937 makes her an influential advocate of classical Hollywood's narrative organisation.[27] Marion notes,

> It is only as events affect and are affected by people that they become significant, and because of this *plot action should arise from and be determined by character*. The plot that grows naturally in such a fashion will be far more credible than the one that has characters hacked and fitted to it; for the reason that, in real life, practically all situations are motivated, precipitated and manipulated by human characteristics.[28]

The composition of the screenplay is founded on the classical Hollywood tenet of motivational causality. Bordwell *et al*. argue that, 'In Hollywood cinema, a specific sort of narrative causality operates as the dominant, making temporal and spatial systems vehicles for it'.[29] This particular kind of narrative organisation is a fundamental component of the classical Hollywood 'package'. Narratives are based around goal-orientated protagonists, who overcome obstacles in order to meet those goals. Once those goals are established, a chain of cause-and-effect unravels until the final resolution. These goals are often psychological desires, manifested through physical action - the hero loves the girl (psychological desire), so he attempts to rescue her (physical action). As early as 1921 Maugham noted that there was, 'no excuse for the author if his stories are not coherent and probable, if his psychology (to use the somewhat pompous term by which the play of motive is known in the world of pictures) is not reasonable, and his characters and the incidents he chooses to illustrate them not true to life'.[30] The values he expounds are comprehensibility, which is achieved in terms of narrative through character motivated causality; and storytelling, which is achieved through continuity. Character motivated causality was identified in the American manuals as the prime narrative drive in classical Hollywood cinema. Hills' 'Plot Genie' promoted narrative based on character motivation, as it, 'intensifies drama for when the reader realizes the cause

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[27] Frances Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories (New York: Convici, Friede, 1937), Sight and Sound Spring 1938: p.47

[28] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, p.32 (Original emphasis). See also Howard T. Dimick, Modern Photoplay Writing (Franklin, Ohio: James Knapp Reeve, 1922)

[29] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.12

[30] W. Somerset Maugham, "On Writing for the Films," North American Review 213.786 May (1921): p.43

underlying the actions of a character, he will react more readily to the situations or predicaments in which the character finds himself. If a story is properly motivated it will be convincing because it will have an atmosphere of logic and probability'.[31] Price notes that, 'the original element or factor which gives the play motivation, like gas, steam and electricity, becomes the prime cause of that motivation'.[32] These screenwriting values were institutionalised as a stable system from the early days of classical Hollywood. While character psychology can be explicated internally in a novel, or via the theatrical convention of the monologue, in classical Hollywood it must be expressed by physical action onscreen. Classical Hollywood emphasises action, and even the smallest physical reaction communicates character psychology.[33] This goes to the heart of cinematic storytelling within the classical Hollywood paradigm: communication comes through action. Because of this emphasis on motivational causality, the diegetic world created by classical Hollywood is knowable, understandable and represented onscreen through character action. Lee notes the different approaches British and American writers had to such a world:

> This famous British tradition of NON-REACTION does not help our film industry. Far from it! Taking such a scene in England, we writers would hastily UNDER WRITE; and hope it does not get 'too sticky'. Our mercurial cousins would be rubbing their gleeful hands and elaborating and building the 'highspot' of their story to a forceful fade-out.[34]

The diegetic world created by classical Hollywood is based on visible action and reaction. All action should be triggered by motivated character choice: random events should not occur. Basing story practice on character emphasised a narrative world which was strongly closed – all aspects of complication and resolution are present in the motivated actions of the characters - and internally coherent. Narrative composition and organisation in classical Hollywood derives from the central understanding of story as a vehicle for the expression of

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[31] Wycliffe Aber Hill, Index Book for use with The Plot Genie: General Formula (Los Angeles: E.E. Gagnon Co., c.1931), p.21
[32] Ted Price, Power in the Screenplay (1935), p.36
[33] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.15
[34] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.167 Original emphasis

character. Peggy Robertson attributed the differences in Hollywood and British productions to the slower pace of British life.[35]

While the importance of character and characterisation is discussed in many of the British manuals, they emphasise organising narrative and composition of the screen idea around the concept of 'theme'. Theme is a central idea running through the screenplay; it is what the drama is 'about'. Buchanan describes how such thematic composition might occur:

> First and foremost is the *idea*, born in the director's mind. Maybe he saw a car-smash, a model dairy, a ballet, or some penguins, and one or other of these sights planted the germ of an idea within his brain, which, if sufficiently developed, would make a film.[36]

Similarly, Jackson has a chapter on 'Choosing a Theme', as does Gale, and Buchanan in his 1936 manual.[37] Writing for an amateur film-society magazine, Brunel suggests the writer might begin with theme, and then apply it to their characters: 'Take War; there is hardly a more dramatic subject. Apply the tragedy and futility of War to a family, a circle of friends or set of characters, and you have the makings of irresistible drama.'[38] Unlike Marion's advice, this emphasises the conceptual shift in story composition away from character and motivational causality, to stories *about* a subject. The primacy of plot can be traced directly to Aristotle's *Poetics*: 'every drama alike has spectacle, character, plot, diction, song and reasoning. But the most important of them is the structure of the events'.[39] Norman Lee's advice closely mirrors Aristotle's: 'of the five leading story values – theme, treatment, plot, dialogue and characterization – I place *theme* first'.[40] The privileging of story/theme over character when developing screen ideas recurs throughout the advice from British manuals in the 1920s and 1930s. Such a focus on thematic composition had been common in American manuals of the 1920s. Writing in 1920, Emerson and Loos describe

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[35] Barbara Hall, "An Oral History with Peggy Robertson", 2002, OH131, Oral History Program, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, p.80
[36] Andrew Buchanan, Film Making From Script to Screen (London: Faber & Faber, 1937), p.32
[37] Jackson, Writing for the Screen , Arthur Gale, How to Write a Movie (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd., 1937), Buchanan, The Art of Film Production
[38] Adrian Brunel, "Make It Worth While! A Frank Talk to the Societies," Home Movies & Home Talkies 3.5 October (1934): p.184
[39] Aristotle, Poetics, p.11
[40] Lee, Money for Film Stories, pp.14 & 26

theme as 'the great trick of the trade', although they then discuss the important aspects of composition in terms of character.[41] As the classical Hollywood mode of production stabilised after 1917, a narrative system based on causality became institutionalised as dominant. By the 1930s, the basis of story composition in the US had evolved from beginning with theme to beginning with character. This process had not happened concurrently in Britain, although it can be seen filtering into the consciousness of some British manual writers during the 1930s. While Margrave refers directly to Frances Marion who, 'thinks plot is less important than character, and declares that a strong character writes its own plot', he goes on to cite a number of themes the aspirant writer might utilise for story composition. He does not refer specifically to character as a starting point for beginning to compose the screen idea.[42] While closely tied as narrative resources, the relationship between plot/theme and character was strongly inclined towards plot/theme in Britain in the 1930s; while in the US, writer Tamar Lane summarises the core of the classical Hollywood model by stating that 'strong characters usually make strong plots'.[43] This alternative valuation of narrative resources reflects the emergence of a distinct hierarchy of story values in Britain. However, by 1937, Gale's advice on plot construction demonstrates the influence of classical Hollywood's compositional techniques: 'The simplest method of plot writing is to set an objective for some character and then to throw obstacles in the way of its attainment…the hero, with whom the audience sympathizes, is the *protagonist*; the villain is the *opponent* and the heroine is the *objective*'.[44] Such advice was strongly grounded in the techniques of classical Hollywood. By the mid- to late 1930s, the strictures of classical Hollywood were bleeding into the theory and practice of British screenwriting.

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[41] John Emerson and Anita Loos, How to Write Photoplays (New York: The James McCann Company, 1920), p.21 (original emphasis). Other examples of American manuals which focus on thematic inspiration include Willard King Bradley, Inside Secrets of Photoplay Writing (London: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1926) Hill, Index Book for use with The Plot Genie: General Formula, p.21
The Plot Genie was a device which generated plot for the reader by way of a series of wheels, the numbers of which would correspond to a plot 'element' – character, location, action. Hill brought out a series of 'supplemental' Index Books throughout the 1930s, including 'Action-Adventure' (1931); 'Detective Mystery' (1933); and 'Comedy' (1936).
[42] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, pp.24-27
[43] Tamar Lane, The New Technique of Screen Writing: A Practical Guide to the Writing and Marketing of Photoplays (London: Whittlesey House, 1936), p.107
[44] Gale, How to Write a Movie, pp.61-62

This was exemplified in Margrave's 1937 manual *Successful Film Writing*, which used the development of London Film Productions' *The Ghost Goes West* [1935, dir. Rene Clair, sc. Robert E. Sherwood] to demonstrate typical development within a professional studio. A film with 'exportable ambitions', the process of development also reveals the compositional paradigm rooted partly in the classical Hollywood tenet of motivational-causality, while utilising a hybrid story structure in the addition of a romance storyline.

The original idea came from Eric Keown's short story published in *Punch*. It was developed in scenario form by Geoffrey Kerr, and the final shooting script written by Sherwood and Clair. Clair states that, 'Alexander Korda told me about the short story from *Punch*, and he said he intended to make it into a film'.[45] The development stages were published in Margrave's manual, which allowed the reader to chart the story development as well as the technical differences between each development stage. The final shooting script included final shot-length, which caused the reviewer from *Sight and Sound* to speculate that the 'would-be film writer may well despair of writing for an industry which is planned in advance down to the split second as well. The general reader may be led into assuming such exactness to be a characteristic of British film production'.[46] Such exactness was useful in demonstrating how a screen idea is adapted from a short story, through a scenario stage, to a final script with a view to the shooting process.

The final film tells the story of Donald Glourie (Robert Donat), descendant of the Glourie clan and modern-day owner of the Glourie castle, which is haunted by his ancestor Murdoch (also Donat). Murdoch was killed in a feud with the rival clan MacLaggan. Donald is forced to sell the castle to satisfy his creditors. He sells it to American food magnate Joe Martin (Eugene Pallet), after Martin's daughter Peggy (Jean Parker) becomes enchanted with the castle. Donald is shocked to hear that Martin intends to dismantle and rebuild the castle in Florida, but agrees to supervise the move due to his increasing affection for Peggy. Their romance is played out in a number of scenes in which Murdoch is mistaken for Donald. When news of the ghost filters out, the value of the castle is

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[45] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.50
[46] W.F., "Successful Film Writing," Sight and Sound Autumn 1936: p.93

increased, and the ghost taken as a celebrity. Once in Florida, the castle is 'Americanised' with jazz music and a fake moat. However, Murdoch is able to right the ancient feud as he gains revenge on the American ancestor of the MacLaggans, and Martin's current-day rival, Bigelow (Ralph Bunker), while Peggy and Donald continue their romance. The narrative focuses on romance and trans-Atlantic co-operation played out against the backdrop of America (the new) against Scotland (history). In his manual, Margrave discusses the development of the screen idea from the first treatment to the final film scenario:

> The reader will note from this treatment of the story which became the film scenario that in some instances the action has been compressed or extended or completely changed. Sequences have been transported; some have been omitted and some have been added but the general plan of the film is here. From this general plan or outline another treatment is prepared with greater detail; with added pieces of dialogue which make some sequences more important to the narrative and others less important. In order not to embarrass the reader I have omitted three long sequences which were dropped entirely. These were one showing the dismantling of the castle; one in which Murdoch learns in advance that his ancient home is to be transported abroad; and one on board ship introducing an element of jealousy into the romance between Peggy and Donald. The omission of these sequences has straightened the central shaft of the narrative, which has been strengthened by such elements as the expansion of the reception of the ghost in New York and by the inspiration which made Ed Bigelow himself the last of the MacLaggans, and so transformed the climax.[47]

Margrave's explanation provides the reader with a firm idea of professional script practice. While elements of the story are changed, moved or deleted, the 'general plan of the film' remains in place. The essence of the film's appeal - contained in Keown's short story –was being able to,

> see a cheerful ghost pursue an unknown enemy from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century and across the Atlantic Ocean seemed to me to be a subject ideally suited to the camera…The poetic and imaginative qualities of this subject seemed to me ideally suited to the film medium. These qualities are rare in films, but they have been brilliantly illustrated in the films of Charles Chaplin and Walt Disney.[48]

While other story resources are expanded, moved or deleted, this essence of the screen idea remained in place. Margrave notes that the incremental development between the first treatment and the final film scenario stage is missing in his manual. As such, there appears to be a vast difference between the first treatment

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[47] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.53
[48] Ibid., pp. 50-51

and final scenario, whereas in practice there was likely to have been an incremental evolution through a number of draft treatments and scripts. In fact, the published version of the first treatment is very close to the final continuity.

While Clair may have summarised the film's central screen idea, a number of other themes were added to expand the story to a feature-length film.[49] These include the ghost seeking to avenge a slight, the transportation of the castle, the juxtaposition of 'old' and 'new' worlds, and the character of the ghost. The major change between the short story and the treatment is the addition of the love story, which is not present in Eric Keown's original conception. While such romantic storylines were a staple part of classical Hollywood narrative organisation, Margrave invites the reader to:

> take note in Shots 53 to 64 how the scenario of *The Ghost Goes West* sheds the introductory theme – the establishing of the existence of a ghost – and establishes the theme of the selling of the castle of Glourie. In the scenes that follow we have an admirable example of the device called Parallel Action, which is merely the method by which two threads of narrative are developed at the same time until – in defiance of Euclid – they meet and merge.[50]

Margrave denies the 'classical' deployment of this thread – in both the Aristotelian and Hollywood conceptions - describing it instead as a disparate 'parallel' action. However, the two narratives merge, and the resolution of both strands become interlinked: the Ghost avenges his slight, which allows the romantic union to occur. The addition of this secondary narrative allowed for the exploitation of Jean Parker's star turn as Peggy, and adds an American 'accent' to the film, true to its trans-Atlantic production intentions.

While the story structure may have deviated from classical Hollywood's paradigm of following a single narrative thread, Margrave's manual emphasises the compositional value of motivation in the story construction. It is centred on the character of the Ghost: he is a dilettante whose absent-mindedness (in the short story), later reworked to imply an effeminate cowardice (by the final continuity) directly precipitates the narrative. It is his character journey which Clair found so appealing. Classical Hollywood's compositional paradigm is

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[49] Ian W. MacDonald, "Disentangling the Screen Idea," Journal of Media Practice 5.2 (2004): p.90

[50] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.22

based on the importance of character centred motivation, and Margrave expands upon the importance of character motivation:

> When a film director asks a scenario writer to adapt a story to films, he instructs him to see that every sequence has a motive. Motive is the secret of flowing continuity of action. The absence of motive is the explanation of the spasms by which a poor film unfolds its theme. Motive is a powerful aid not only to maintaining interest, but also to creating the semblance of reality. It is difficult to imagine any story failing to be credible if motive is closely knit into its fabric. The modern film-goer insists on films presenting credible people in credible situations, and the writer can measure his success in credibility by his success in motive.[51]

This advice is reinforced in the script and story examples from *The Ghost Goes West*. Examining each sequence of the treatment reveals narrative progression as a direct result of character motivation:

Sequence	**Character Motivation**	**Narrative Progression**
1	MacLaggans hate the Glouries	MacLaggans insult the Glouries
2	Murdoch loves Girls	Kisses girls before going to war
3	Murdoch respects his father	Murdoch goes to war.
4	Murdoch loves Girls	Murdoch is killed before he can avenge the insult
5	Glourie is disappointed	Murdoch is cursed until the insult is avenged
6	Donald wants to sell the Castle	See Sequence 7
7	Peggy wants to buy the Castle	Returns with her parents
	Donald wants to sell	Donald invites Mr and Mrs Martin to dinner
8	The Creditors want the Castle to be sold	They agree to finance and serve at dinner
9	Mrs McNiff does not want the Ghost to appear	She puts the clocks back so the Martin's leave early
10	Murdoch looks for a MacLaggan	Murdoch encounters Peggy
	Peggy is unafraid	She talks to the Ghost
	Murdoch loves Girls	He plays the game with Peggy

[51] Ibid., p.31

	Peggy is unafraid	She kisses Donald
11	Donald likes Peggy	He barters badly and sells the Castle to Martin. Donald agrees to travel to America to supervise the rebuilding.
12		Castle is shipped
13	Martin's ego	He boasts to Bigelow that he has a Castle and a Ghost
14	Murdoch wants to find a MacLaggan	The Ghost causes consternation onboard
15	Murdoch likes girls Peggy likes Donald Donald is shy	Murdoch plays the forfeits game with Peggy. She is prepared to give a kiss, but Murdoch disappears, and Donald is there instead. Peggy thinks Donald is making fun of her.
16	Mrs. Martin is afraid of the Ghost	The sale is cancelled
17	Bigelow wants to get one up of his rival Martin	Bigelow offers to take over the sale of the castle as he senses a business opportunity, so bids for the castle
	Martin refuses to be bettered by Bigelow	Martin sees that he will lose out to Bigelow, and increases his own bid
18	Martin wants publicity	Triumphant reception in New York
19	Murdoch wants to find a MacLaggan	Comedy as he has trouble talking with New Yorkers
20	Donald is shy	He is busy with the rebuilding, and his attitude enamours Peggy towards him
21	Martin wants publicity Bigelow wants to see Martin humbled	He dressed in Scottish garb at a dinner party Bigelow attends the party
22	Martin wants publicity Bigelow wants to see Martin humbled	Martin is worried when the Ghost does not materialise Bigelow is happy as he is to win his bet.
23	Murdoch does not like the Americans and refuses to enter the hall	Murdoch meets a drunk man in the hall. Because Murdoch won't go into the hall, the drunk man insults Murdoch. Murdoch slaps the drunk man. The drunk man is the last of the MacLaggans, and the curse is lifted.
24		Murdoch tells Donald he is to go to Heaven
25	Donald is grateful	Donald dresses as Murdoch, crosses the

	because he has met Peggy and the curse is lifted	Hall, and Martin wins his bet.
26	Peggy loves Donald	Peggy thinks she is confiding in Murdoch (Donald dressed up) when she tells him that she loves Donald.
	Donald loves Peggy	Donald does not give himself away, but decides what he must do.
27	Peggy and Donald love each other	They dance together in the happy-ending.

This breakdown reveals the very tight, character-driven narrative of *The Ghost Goes West*. While some minor elements of the narrative were changed in the final continuity, the use of such a character-driven narrative as an example of good practice illustrates how classical Hollywood's storytelling paradigm was becoming valued by some writers in British screenwriting. The intention to distribute *The Ghost Goes West* in the USA was doubtless a central factor in the deployment of narrative resources along classical Hollywood lines. The trans-Atlantic success of the film lead to Margrave – a British practitioner – lauding the compositional paradigm. While Hollywood's influence continued to be exerted throughout the 1930s, other British manuals tended to ground their advice in the classical narrative paradigm, and offer compositional and story advice distinct from those aspects valued by classical Hollywood.

This process of negotiation also found space to accommodate other impulses in British screenwriting. Both Brunel and Buchanan argue that a distinctly British film form should be created by combining elements of the documentary movement with drama: 'fictional narratives enacted in and around real places – a blending of personal drama or comedy set against industrial, pastoral or similar settings in the world of reality'.[52] This proposal was directed partially towards amateur filmmakers, who were able to operate outside of the economic purview of classical Hollywood. Brunel emphasised the success he achieved in the 1920s with a series of low-cost burlesques. Indeed, one of the attractions of documentary filmmaking was the low cost. By accommodating these impulses in the dramatic form, there was a seam of realism, which runs

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[52] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.19. See also Buchanan, Film Making , Brunel, Film Craft

through the history of British cinema. However, Thompson notes that, 'The basis of the American classical cinema's narrative aesthetic was compositional unity rather than realism. Reality might be full of random events and coincidences, but film-makers sought to motivate as much as possible causally'.[53] Pepper, whose manual draws on experience of both Hollywood and British markets, implores writers to, 'avoid coincidence like the plague. It is never convincing on stage or film, however true to life it may be'.[54] This maxim of Hollywood practice derives from the centrality of character in story. All aspects of narrative organisation are a function of the central character. There is little room for coincidence because coincidence in film displaces character as the primary force which progresses the narrative, and as such, it was discouraged in classical Hollywood composition. The impulse of some British practitioners to incorporate aspects of documentary realism into their narrative organisation was a recognition, in part, of creating a cinema distinct from the closed world of classical Hollywood, as well as celebrating and exploiting a paradigm of British success. While instances of coincidence fall towards the anti-plot corner of McKee's story triangle, such impulses may have manifested in practice by means other than coincidence.[55] These manuals proposed placing realism rather than causality as the central pillar of narrative organisation within British cinema.

A further example, and equally influential on British screenwriting practice, was Russian montage theory. The intellectualisation of film, begun by Kuleshov and built upon by Eisenstein and Pudovkin, appealed to members of an intellectual, avant-garde movement within British film, who located themselves in and around the Film Society and the journal *Close Up*. The Russians' writing on film was published in a number of outlets in Britain, including a screenwriting manual written by Pudovkin, published in English in 1933. The Film Society was set-up in 1925 by Ivor Montagu (who later translated Pudovkin's manual) and actor Hugh Miller. Important Film Society members included Adrian Brunel, Iris Barry, Walter Mycroft, Anthony Asquith, Michael Balcon, John Gielgud, Ivor Novello and George Pearson.[56] Sexton argues that the Film Society acted as a

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[53] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.175
[54] Dick L. Pepper, The Technique of the Photoplay (London: 1925), p.197
[55] McKee, Story, p.45
[56] Sexton, "The Film Society," p.293

locus for British alternative culture, which deconstructed and merged international ideas into a native, 'distinctly British' film movement.[57] By the late 1920s,

> overt antipathy to theatrical and literary values intensified, however, many protagonists within minority film culture became enamoured with the school of Soviet montage, most particularly the work of Eisenstein and Pudovkin. These films seemed so fresh to British aesthetes that they soon relinquished adherence to the German films, which appeared static and antiquated by comparison. A particular group of Soviet films were therefore singled out for their dynamism: in particular, of course, the manner by which they constructed their films around montage – seen as a uniquely cinematic technique – was much admired. Their extensive use of location shooting also further distinguished them from theatrical 'staginess'.[58]

The influence of Soviet montage was reinforced in 1929 when both Pudovkin and Eisenstein came to England to speak to the Film Society.[59] Montage theory's unique cinematic quality situates meaning in the succession of images projected onscreen. Kuleshov first proposed a theory of montage, noting that, 'what is important is not what is shot in a given piece, but how the pieces in a film succeed one another, how they are structured'.[60] He went on to note that, 'Pure action constitutes the basis of the film scenario. Movement, dynamics – these are the material of the film spectacle'.[61] This notion of movement – frame on frame, within the shot, of the projector – was taken up strongly within British screenwriting practice. Pudovkin states that, 'editing is the basic creative force' of cinema.[62] The ability to cut, to show scenes from different angles is the unique basis of cinematic art. The definitive version of montage was given by Eisenstein in an essay published in the journal *Close Up* in September 1929: 'in my view montage is not an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one

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[57] Ibid., p.300
[58] Ibid., p.296-297
[59] Gerry Turvey, "Towards a Critical Practice, Ivor Montagu and British Film Culture in the 1920s," in ed. Andrew Higson, Young and Innocent: The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), Andrew Higson, ed., Young and Innocent: The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930 (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002), p.318
[60] Lev Kuleshov, Kuleshov on Film, ed. Ronald Levaco (London: University of California Press, 1974), p.129
[61] Ibid., p.90
[62] V.I. Pudovkin, Film Technique, trans. Ivor Montagu (London: George Newnes, 1933), p.xv

another (the "dramatic principal")'.[63] This standpoint foregrounds the visual movement of cinema as the principle dramatic source, rather than story. Indeed, there is little mention of story composition within the corpus of montage theory. Rather it focuses on the mechanical and psychological creation of meaning through the 'collisions' created by the movement of images. Their work was lauded as a 'magnificent and inspired' example of filmmaking in Brunel's 1936 manual.[64] Such work was divisive within Britain: Buchanan noted that *Jazz Comedy* [1934, dir. Grigori Aleksandrov; sc. Aleksandrov, Nikolai Erdman, Vladimir Z. Mass], 'has been acclaimed by half the intelligentsia as cleverly funny, and by the other half as pathetic'.[65] However, the influence of Soviet montage was felt most strongly in British story composition in the importance placed on a particular understanding of 'movement' within narrative organisation.

Movement was the key concept in story composition in British manuals from the 1920s onwards, as writers struggled to establish a theory of practice distinct from literature and specific for the medium. Allen notes, 'The very words "moving picture" convey the needs of the screen. The story must move'.[66] However, in the rush to establish a uniquely cinematic theory of practice, the technical capabilities of the medium were placed above its storytelling properties. Buchanan and Brunel both describe four types of movement which are physical, but not related to the development of the story: movement within the mise-en-scene, movement of the camera, movement onscreen, and editorial movement achieved through cutting.[67] Buchanan notes that the writer must: '[first] remember your medium and its demand for *movement*. Secondly, that movement is created by both the action taking place in shots, and also by the relation of a series of shots one to the other.'[68] Unlike classical Hollywood's causal action, the action they describe is movement without motivation. This foregrounds the notion of spectacle over story. This advice may have come in

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[63] Sergei Eisenstein, The Eisenstein Reader, trans. Richard Taylor and William Powell, ed. Richard Taylor (London: BFI, 1998), p.95 (Original emphasis).
[64] Brunel, Film Production, p.6
[65] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.13
[66] Allen, How to Write a Film Story, p.21
[67] Buchanan, Film Making, pp.25-31, Brunel, Film Production, pp.9-17
[68] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.45

response to the static adaptations of literary works which were common in British cinema in the early 1930s – the 'drawing room' film. Equally, such advice may accommodate other impulses of spectacle within British cinema, specifically the music and variety hall. However, the emphasis on movement appears to be an imperfect articulation of Brunel and Buchanan's stance on cinema. They were amongst the vanguard of British theorists to advocate story as the leading principle of British screenwriting. It seems likely that their emphasis on movement was a reaction to static, staged adaptations of literary works, or as a response to the unique requirements of writing for the screen, rather than a rejection of story as the primary impulse of screenwriting. Indeed, both called for more original works written specifically for the screen Brunel omitted 'movement' as a story value in his later manual.[69] Buchanan implores the writer to, 'resist the temptation to include in his story idealistic pictorial sequences that do not contribute to the narrative, but which merely exhibit his picture sense. Nor must he select subjects which offer him "picture" possibilities at the expense of story'.[70] This seems to contradict his earlier advice, and explicitly denies the privileging of movement above story within the screenplay. However, it is important to note that this advice may have been assimilated and replicated by the field. The importance of movement is best summarised by John Paddy Carstairs, a British screenwriter who worked successfully in Britain and in Hollywood. He contributed a section to Norman Lee's 1937 manual, in which he states that, 'Action does not necessarily mean only physical action, train crashes, galloping horses, chases, ninety-mile an hour autos. Action is also movement of the story, keeping the sequences flowing, never allowing your characters to remain static for long periods'.[71] Carstairs distinguishes between physical movement and story movement, and while instances of spectacle are important, his title – 'The Story is Everything' – places narrative progression at the apex of an organisational hierarchy. While imperfectly described by Buchanan and Brunel, the distinction of placing story above spectacle and other elements of narrative organisation was key in British screenwriting.

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[69] Adrian Brunel, Film Script, The Technique of Writing for the Screen (London: Burke, 1948)
[70] Buchanan, Film Making, p.36
[71] John Paddy Carstairs, "The Story is Everything," in ed. Norman Lee, Money for Film Stories (London: Pitman, 1937), p.165

However, spectacle is an integral part of the classical Hollywood 'package'. Car chases, musical songs, dance routines have always formed part of the entertainment. In many cases, these instances of spectacle are motivated and contribute to the unfolding narrative. Aspects of spectacle, such as a character bursting into song, form staple elements of generic film production. The audience negotiates such instances of genre through verisimilitude, the 'specific systems of expectations and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema'.[72] Generic film production, and the consumption of spectacle was also a part of British film production; perhaps even more so in the case of variety or musical hall acts which were transposed to film. However, verisimilitude breaks the Aristotelian principle of internal completeness and closure. If the audience has to bring with them such systems of expectation and understanding in order to comprehend the unfolding narrative, then this extra-diegetic information breaks (consciously or not) the closed artifice of the story world.

While British manuals may have not focussed so strongly on causality as those of classical Hollywood, some elements of causal plotting were strongly advocated: in particular, narrative organisation based around rising action, and a three-act narrative structure based on a beginning, middle and end. This narrative organisation was proposed by Aristotle and refined through dramatic theorists like Ibsen, William Archer and Gustav Freytag. Classical Hollywood incorporates this form of classical narrative organisation within its primary causal impulse, and many American manuals cited these theorists.[73] While Freytag's dramatic pyramid consists of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement, this model of narrative structure was superseded in cinematic storytelling by the concept of continually rising action.[74] The emphasis in British screenwriting manuals was to create a series of events, each 'bettered' by the next until reaching the final climax during the denouement. American Tamar Lane describes narrative construction thus:

> The dramatic interest in a story should start at the beginning of the plot and rise gradually with an increasing suspense that keeps building, building, building up to the chief punch situation and climax at the very end of the film. Don't start

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[72] Steve Neale, Genre and Hollywood (London: Routledge, 2000), p.31
[73] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.17
[74] Ibid., p.169

> your story off too strong, in either pace or dramatic thunder, unless you have situations which, in aura and suspense, can exceed those opening scenes as the script proceeds. The further the plot progresses, the more powerful must become the situation. This caution should also be observed in the middle of the story. Here the script should be stronger than the early portion, but lesser in dramatic force than the second half. No situation should be placed in the centre of a scenario that cannot be 'topped' in drama or there will be an anti-climax.[75]

Similarly, both Jackson and Allen describe the 'untangling' of the narrative in the final climax.[76] Buchanan ranks story events in terms of dramatic impact, and argues that they must be placed in ascending order.[77] Such narrative organisation placed British screen theorists within the classical Hollywood camp. The 'topping' of each story event until a grand climax was reached moved away from the dramaturgical stance of the literary tradition, and is grounded in a specifically cinematic language. The British manuals' theory of 'movement', and specifically 'forward movement', accounts for this stance. Unlike Freytag's pyramid, which rises to a climax before falling back again, the drive for forward movement demands the screenwriter not go back, in terms of story events, and crucially, in terms of emotional impact. Each event must better the last. Perhaps 'upwards', rather than 'forward' movement might be accurate in describing this narrative organisation. This presented difficulties in practice. For example, Lajos Biro had to deal with the anticlimactic ending in his adaptation of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. In the book, the central protagonist, Paul Baumer, is killed without drama, on the eponymous quiet day. Biro notes, 'This menial contrast is very difficult to show with filmic means. To alter the events and to insert a drama would be unartistic, and even impossible with this book read by millions'.[78] His solution was to add an additional sequence, when a friend of Baumer's returns to the school classroom and has a vision of the boys as they were before the War, and as they are, dead and wounded, after the War. Such practice illustrates the difficult negotiation screenwriters faced attempting to accommodate the story demands with the paradigmatic value placed on a strong climax.

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[75] Lane, The New Technique of Screen Writing, p.109-110
[76] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, pp.36-37, Allen, How to Write a Film Story, p.46
[77] Buchanan, Film Making, p.33
[78] Lajos Biro, "All Quiet on the Western Front", nd., Item 8, The Lajos Biro Collection, The British Film Institute London

This focus on the climax adds importance to the nature of the final story event. Within the classical Hollywood 'package', this event is usually described as a happy-ending – an upbeat resolution to the narrative. Emerson and Loos state that, 'People do not want very tragic stories which depress them for the next twenty-four hours. Hence the necessity for a happy-ending in most stories'.[79] Marion states that the writer should end their story, 'in a logical and dramatic way that brings [...] happiness'.[80] British screenwriting manuals negotiated the strictures of classical Hollywood, and classical narrative, which encompassed tragic or downbeat resolutions. Certainly many British manuals advocated writing an upbeat resolution. Jackson states that the audience, 'wants Life served broadly, cleanly, and entertainingly, with the bad spots carefully left out'.[81] Allen discusses the merits of narrative resolution in terms of national character, and international success:

> The Britisher is often accused of a desire to wallow in sadness and misery, but he really has no place for it unless it is used as a foil for happiness. It is the heart-break and misery which must be endured before ultimate happiness is secured which finds a response in the heart of the Britisher. He does not love morbidity, and he has no desire to revel in unpleasant emotions. So, unless your story would fall apart without it, leave tragedy alone. The finest examples of deserved success in film-land are those which have resulted in the world-wide fame of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. Fairbanks takes adventure and romance, mixes it with a little love and a lot of human understanding...and makes happy pictures.[82]

The success of Hollywood production, with its emphasis on 'happy pictures' is lauded as the 'finest examples of deserved success'. Fairbanks and Pickford's stories of adventure and romance are privileged as examples of successful story practice. The cultural and economic capital associated with their success creates a hierarchy of story values, where success is associated with certain kinds of story. The use of 'deserved' in Allen's paragraph reinforces the 'natural' value of such success. Such stories, with their generic structures, are established as inevitable successes because of the value of these structures. The influence of classical Hollywood's economic and cultural capital is masked by such doxa.

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[79] Emerson and Loos, How to Write Photoplays, pp.74-75
[80] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, p.52
[81] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.29
[82] Allen, How to Write a Film Story, pp.23-24

While Margarve acknowledged the criticism of the happy-ending endemic within screenwriting discourses, he situates his argument in its favour firmly within the Aristotelian paradigm of unity.

> The Happy-ending should not be scorned. It is the logical climax to the point of view essential to the film writer. The Happy-ending became despised because so many film narratives were distorted to yield a Hearts and Flowers fade-out. If the Happy-ending is forced upon a narrative, it becomes an unhappy-ending. The Happy-ending is the logical ending. It is the ending inherent in the film theme. It is the Inevitable Ending. It may be humorous or romantic or heroic or tragic. It must be the commonsense outcome of the combinations and permutations of the characters and situations having preceded it.[83]

His justification distances practice from the classical Hollywood hierarchy Allen propounds, and which foists the 'Hearts and Flowers fade-out' inappropriately upon narratives. Instead, Margrave's argument places story value and unity of action at the fore. Thus, the final story event is the inevitable conclusion of that which has come before. Aristotle describes the end as, 'that which does itself naturally follow from something else'.[84] Margrave's interpretation of the happy-ending is not restricted to an upbeat story event. Instead, the happy-ending is a unified closure of the preceding story, which may be upbeat or otherwise, but it is determined by the story value. The final story event is the inevitable 'necessary or probably' conclusion to the narrative. All previous story events must lead inexorably to this final climax; the economic deployment of narrative resources means that the climax is the perfect apex of what has occurred before.

This classical narrative conception of the final narrative event places story at the apex of a hierarchy of values. Aristotle's ending, which 'naturally follows' illustrates a doxa in which cultural capital associated with classical narrative places story as the primary organisational value. Margrave's advice negotiates this position, and reinforces notions of unity and closure within the final story event. This position is not incompatible with the strictures of the classical Hollywood package. Indeed, an upbeat happy-ending which follows seamlessly from the preceding story events may be a preferable story design within both classical paradigms. However, the emphasis in Allen and Margrave's advice is slightly different: Allen propounds the classical Hollywood design,

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[83] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.29
[84] Aristotle, Poetics, p.13

noting the success of American practitioners who have successfully utilised final story events. The foregrounding of adventure and romance as story themes illustrates the classical Hollywood package as a successful business model. Conversely, Margrave's advice foregrounds classical narrative notions of unity, which place story as the culturally supported story value. While distinct from 'drawing room romance and sophistication', such work emanates from literary tradition, based on classical narrative.

The tension between these different narrative paradigms is demonstrated in the manuals' description of script format and layout. Different layouts delineate the dual roles a script plays in production: it is a cultural document, relaying story information; and it is a technical document, instructing the crew during shooting. MacDonald has suggested that the struggle over the format in the 1920s represented a low-level conflict over the role of the screenwriter, and the distribution of credit within the creative process.[85] US practice established the continuity script after 1914, a technical development that, 'made possible the increase in films' lengths and the retention of the standards of a good film'.[86] British practice in the 1920s utilised variations of the master scene format, a more 'writerly' format which divides the narrative into a series of master scenes, and then specifies shots if necessary. Further, British screenplays in the 1920s described everything required on screen, from dramatic structure, to particular technical shots, to notes for the director. This specification of the visual represents,

> a British attempt to reconcile both a dramatic sense of performance within a scene as a unit, and the visual 'unit' of a shot or transition, on the same page. Unlike the US continuity, which is shot-based and designed for the shooting process, this practice attempts to show both dramatic structure and cinematic style at the same time.[87]

While the presence of the American producers lead to some convergence of practice in the 1930s, this more 'writerly' format continued to be advocated by

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[85] Ian W. MacDonald, "The Struggle for the Silents: the British screenwriter from 1910 to 1930." 2007

[86] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.138

[87] MacDonald, "Playwriting for the Pictures: The Shaping of the Screen Idea in Early British Cinema."

British screenwriting manuals. Such practice reflects not only the continuing desire of British screenwriters to exert influence over authorship, but also demonstrates the foregrounding of story as the primary impulse in construction.

Writing in 1929, Jackson describes the difference between English and American script format, and notes an emerging convergence of practice, which he calls the 'Modern Method'.[88] The English method follows the master scene format, with each scene given a number (N), and each shot within that scene numbered consecutively (Na, Nb etc.). The advantage of this system sees shots grouped together. The disadvantage comes during long scenes with many shots, so that a shot may be numbered Naa etc. The American system is the continuity format, with no scene division, and shots numbered consecutively. The advantage of the continuity system is that shots are easily identifiable, the disadvantage that, 'each shot is complete in itself, there is no grouping of shots into scenes, and the task of connecting up the action when the script is on the floor is by no means easy'.[89] In order to overcome these difficulties, Jackson proposes a new method, which will 'modify the American method so that it conforms more nearly to the English method. In other words, we number each shot serially, keep each shot complete within itself, and put a scene-heading before each group of shots within the same set or location'.[90] The 'Modern Method' maintains a dramatic sense within the technical requirements of the production process. This method appears to have held some short-term influence; Buchanan argues for the integrated 'Modern Method' in his 1932 manual. However, as a form of practice, it appears to have been short-lived. By his 1937 manual, Buchanan had adopted the continuity format. All of the other British manuals published in the 1930s utilised the continuity format without the addition of the scene-heading to group scenes together.[91]

The scene-heading layout may have been replaced by the move to continuity scripting by the 1930s, but the dramatic impulse it represented

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[88] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, pp.73-74
[89] Ibid., p.105
[90] Ibid., p.106
[91] The only examples of divergent practice comes in the division of the continuity script; with instruction for action on the left, and all sound and dialogue cues on the right. Examples of this practice are seen in Gale (1937) and Lee (1937). This is discussed within the context of the integration of sound in Chapter 5.

remained. While British manuals advocated a meta-structure along the Aristotelian beginning-middle-end paradigm, advice on structuring narrative continued to employ master scene or sequential divisions throughout the 1930s. Jackson describes a sequence as a 'series of shots without a time-lapse'.[92] He expands upon this to describe a sequence as the cinematic equivalent of a theatrical curtain, and as such, each sequence should end upon a minor climax, followed by such a 'curtain'. There are usually between seven and twenty sequences in a film. He differentiates a sequence from a scene, which is, 'a place, and there might be several places in one sequence'.[93] This idea is taken up by Buchanan three years later, as he divides the scenario, 'into sequences which, in turn, are divided into scenes (varying camera positions)'.[94] Margrave, whose manual is grounded in the parameters of classical Hollywood, quotes Frances Marion, and has an example script written in continuity by American Robert E. Sherwood – nevertheless describes dramatic sequences as being separated by points of suspense, and averaging 700 feet in length.[95] While certainly widely used as a narrative building block, no definitive definition of the sequence emerged. Lee notes that, 'a workmanlike foundation for a seven-reel picture is to break it into a dozen or more sequences. A sequence is not exactly like a part, as in a novel, or an act, as in a play'.[96] Despite this lack of clarity, the concept was widespread. As late as 1937, Gale describes a sequence as, 'a series of shots concerning one general subject'.[97] Such advice offers an insight into how narrative division was conceptualised in British screenwriting. The episodic nature of using sequences as narrative blocks, with their self-contained location and minor climaxes is more akin to the literary use of chapters, or the theatrical curtain than the continuity progression of classical Hollywood, or the tripartite structure of classical narrative.

While the master scene heading may not have survived beyond the early 1930s on the pages of the script, these manuals encouraged writers to envisage such divisions when conceptualising narrative structure. These divisions indicate

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[92] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.51
[93] Ibid., p.75
[94] Buchanan, Films, p.92
[95] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.32
[96] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.27
[97] Gale, How to Write a Movie, p.18

the assimilation of literary foundations within story construction. While this may have been due to the foregrounding of story as the primary literary impulse, such practice may have limited the 'movement' capabilities of British screen stories. Unlike theatre, the technical aspects of cinema allow for the free movement of narrative in time and location. Editing allows instant transition in time and place from one frame to the next. The conceptualisation of narrative in episodic sequential blocks suggests narrative stasis. While the story may progress, it is likely to remain in one location until the minor climax and 'curtain'. There does appear to be a literary link to this practice, as Fawcett notes, 'The episodic treatment of film subjects is utterly outmoded, however popular it may be with playwrights converting novels into play form'.[98] Episodic or sequential practice may also have been influenced by the variety and music hall, where an evening's entertainment would be made up of a series of self-contained episodes. The prevalence of sequences as narrative divisions may account for the staged feel of many British screenplays during this period. Classical Hollywood advice is largely unburdened by the sequence. While narrative divisions obviously exist in classical Hollywood, the continuity script propels the story towards the final climax.[99] This predilection for episodic narrative structure may be accounted for as a vestige of script formatting, designed to facilitate the shooting process, and representing a vestigial specification of the visual. It certainly appears to incorporate elements of the literary tradition, and as such, it may have provided a mode of story conceptualisation which limited British screenwriters to an uncinematic story construction.

While the technical requirements of writing a continuity scenario appear in the British manuals of the 1930s, the grasp of this body of knowledge does not seem to be a requirement for the neophyte writer. Indeed, the manuals illustrate the field's preference for story over the technical requirements of classical Hollywood by encouraging the neophyte to submit their screen story in a synopsis form. It appears that many story properties were purchased in a synopsis form, and then converted into continuity by technical experts. Brunel disliked writing in continuity form, as he claimed the mass of technical detail

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[98] L'Estrange Fawcett, Writing for the Films (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd., 1937), p.55
[99] Thompson, "Narrative Structure in Early Classical Cinema"

was annoying, and the format made him careless.[100] Jackson describes the writer typically presenting a 20,000 word synopsis to a story editor, who wants to know, 'first, will the story suit his company from the point of view of stock players (that is to say, will the characters necessary to make the story be cast from those artistes who are permanently employed by the company); and second, is the story a good one?'.[101] Norman Lee states that British International bought freelance story properties.[102] Similarly, G.A. Minzenty edited the monthly *Scenario* magazine, which survived for six issues between March and August 1934. *Scenario* acted as a forum for aspiring screenwriters to publish their film synopsis in full, in part or just in title, with the hope of film producers buying the property. However, no film advertised in *Scenario* appears to have been produced. While Jackson notes that the writer should have technical appreciation, studios wanted good stories above the technical competence required for scenario writing. As early as 1924, *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* stated that, 'Authors are strongly advised not to try to write scenarios, but to confine their work to the actual story or synopsis. Most scenarists agree that it takes about three years' hard work to learn to write a scenario adequately'.[103] In the 1936 edition, advice on submitting a story from the British Film Institute instructed writers to,

> 1. Send a synopsis only, and have it typed. The scenario editor is only human, and he doesn't enjoy reading full-length novels in illegible MS
>
> 2. The synopsis must be short – certainly not more than 2000 words, and it must be good. Many screen writers have won their reputations, not by writing good stories, but by making them seem convincing in synopsis.[104]

This division of screenwriting labour appears to have followed standard Hollywood practice. As early as 1920, Emerson and Loos encourage the neophyte to submit a synopsis, which will be, 'put in continuity form by a staff

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[100] Brunel, Film Craft, pp.25-32
[101] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.42
[102] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.8
[103] Christabel Lowndes Yates, "The Kinema and the Author," in ed. Agnes Herbert, The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1924 (London: A&C Black, 1924), p.178
[104] British Film Institute, "How to Submit a Story," in ed. Agnes Herbert, The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1936 (London: A&C Black, 1936), p.222

man'[105]. Marion instructs the writer to avoid the continuity form as, 'It is easier for an agent or studio reader to grasp the good bits of the story'.[106] The continuity format, represented as a body of technical knowledge needed in order to enter the field, is bypassed as manuals on both sides of the Atlantic illustrate the overarching need for the 'good story'.

This chapter has mapped out the ways that British screenwriting manuals negotiated a variety of screenwriting paradigms and other impulses in order to create a distinctively 'good' screenwriting practice. This notion of quality was based primarily, but not exclusively on the Aristotelian notion of classical narrative, distinct from the 'package' of Hollywood classicism. By drawing attention to the paradigms and influences on such practices, I have made explicit that the notion of 'writing a good story' is not inevitable or natural, but rather a negotiation by the field of a number of competing discourses. The economic basis of classical Hollywood's narrative organisation was centred on causal motivation and the creation of character. 'Writing a good story' under the purview of classical Hollywood meant the creation of an unbroken causal chain, resolved by the character action. British screenwriting manuals placed story as the primary narrative impulse, and articulated this through an organisational practice based on classical narrative. 'Writing a good story' meant accommodating the principles of Aristotelian unities, particularly unity of action. This was codified as an economical deployment of story events. However, British manuals also incorporated other notions of story construction, which diverted from classical narrative, but which were negotiated as 'good' by the manuals. The emerging theory of story composition acknowledged classical Hollywood while remaining distinct from it. The accommodation of these various storytelling paradigms may have resulted in some instances of practice which restricted the storytelling within the boundaries of the medium.

While British screenwriting accommodated some aspects of British literary heritage within the story paradigm, the field also attempted to establish screenwriting as a legitimised form of story practice. In doing so, it borrowed

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[105] Emerson and Loos, How to Write Photoplays, p.32
[106] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, p.74

cultural capital from the traditions of the Aristotelian classical narrative, while attempting to create economic capital through financial success. Even when the financial muscle of the Hollywood studio system was brought to bear, this distinct indigenous practice resisted assimilation and was present despite being forced off the page. How this privileging of story worked in practice is demonstrated in the following case study. The tensions between these different organisational values, and how they are articulated in screenwriting practice was particularly acute in the story departments of American studios operating in Britain. The notion of a 'good' story was questioned as many of the American operations, including the Warner Brothers-First National studio at Teddington, produced films quickly and cheaply for the quota market. Quota production was associated with poor quality, and this case study highlights in practice the screenwriting theory discussed above.

Chapter 4: Story Value and the Quota: Warner Brothers – First National in Britain 1931-1939

> All this time you waste with this horse-shit or drawing room romance and sophistication, you can use with the good old hokus pokus melodrama and you won't go wrong. I keep on repeating this as it is the life of our business and makes success or failure.[1]
>
> Jack Warner

Jack Warner's missive is representative of the clash of screenwriting values which occurred in British cinema in the 1930s. The 1927 Cinematograph Act (the 'Act') brought British film production into increasingly proximate contact with Hollywood studios. Many British film companies were producing material for American studios to enable Hollywood to meet their quota requirements. The establishment of American studio operations in Britain during the early 1930s led to an increasing 'interchange of talent' between the two countries.[2] Classical Hollywood's core functions of narrative and profit were exported to Britain with writers, producers and technicians trained in the stable style of classical Hollywood.[3] Classical Hollywood focussed on a specific type of story organisation; but even narrative was subjugated - in Britain at least – for profit. Native story values which espouse a series of 'other' impulses, including the 'well made' qualities associated with classical narrative, were brought into conflict with the industrial demands of classical Hollywood's profit motive and storytelling style which supports the Hollywood 'package'. This style favours verisimilitude, motivational causality and continuity as dominant narrative factors.[4] American workers and studios brought a different conceptual purpose and value of 'story' within the production process. While 'story' was revered in British screenwriting, partly as a consequence of the literary tradition, and partly as a means of national distinction, Hollywood viewed 'story' as another component within the studio's production process. Overshadowing these debates were discourses of speed, cost and quality, emanating from practical considerations of quota production. Quota films and domestic production were

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[1] Jack Warner, "Letter to Irving Asher", 26 January 1932, File 4/4 12/23/31-12/10/34, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

[2] Michael Balcon, "The Interchange of Talent," The Screen Guild Magazine June 1936: p.7

[3] Cowie, "Storytelling: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Classical Narrative," p.179

[4] Ibid., p.182

compared unfavourably with the lavish budgets and stable style of Hollywood production. An overarching hierarchy of value was structured around these different notions of quality, and directly influenced screenwriting theory and practice. [5] Different story or scriptwriting values were brought into particular relief as the Act demanded that the scenario or scriptwriter be British.[6] While Lee stated that, 'The Quota producer's story has *got* to be good. He depends on it. He cannot afford stars or lavish sets, so wisely he relies on an entertaining story', the industrial demands of quota production meant that profit (located in production through high speed and low cost) often overrode story considerations in practice. This drew distinctions in story value in screenwriting practice as well as screenwriting theory. Characterised by Jack Warner as the British 'drawing room romance and sophistication' against the Hollywood paradigm of 'hokus pokus melodrama', a hierarchy of story value was negotiated by British screenwriters working in the Hollywood studios in Britain and working within the quota. The struggle to establish the role and value of 'story' was magnified by the interchange of talent. The discourses of this struggle were seen in public in the trade papers, and in private correspondence in Britain and Hollywood.

The financial and technical advantages of star trading between Hollywood and Britain were highlighted by Michael Balcon. Equally, the exchange of technical talent offered the British film industry, 'experts of tested skill and long experience in the various departments of film production, from whom we are most ready to admit that we can learn much; so we, on our part, can send to Hollywood increasing numbers of men and women possessed of great talent'.[7] American actors, writers and technicians came to Britain in the 1930s. This trawl for talent continued throughout the decade, and was evident in the Hollywood trade press. However, this influx did cause some friction. American Noel Madison, writing in *The Screen Guild Magazine* praised British technical workers, but complained that 'British films were bad because of the writer and director, not because of the cameraman and actor and technician'.[8] John Paddy Carstairs, a British screenwriter and director who worked

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[5] Chibnall, 'Quota-Quickies': The Birth of the British 'B' Film, p.253
[6] Harper, Women in British Cinema, p.10
[7] Balcon, "The Interchange of Talent," p.7
[8] Noel Madison, "London Inside," The Screen Guild Magazine November 1937: pp.24-25

successfully in the US and the UK, wrote a regular 'London Lowdown' column in *The Screen Guild Magazine*, in which he reported opportunities, gossip and the state of British production.[9] Writing in 1934, Carstairs outlined what was 'Wanted in London',

> We could do with a couple of good producers, a dozen screen writers (yes, we have the stage writers and performers) and maybe a director or two, and an art director, soundman and cameraman wouldn't be amiss, but please, Hollywood, send us the best, the ones whom we'll like and the ones who'll like us.[10]

This call for only the best was a reaction to the rush of, 'Hollywood has-beens working in British studios' in the early 1930s.[11] By the mid-1930s, American screenwriters were advised not to travel to Britain unless they had a contract in place.[12] They were further discouraged by the prospect of difficulties with work permits and the prospect of paying high levels of income tax.[13] However, many Hollywood-trained screenwriters and other professionals did make the trip to work in London during the 1930s. They noted the different working practices extant in the British studios. Perez notes that junior writers at Gaumont-British, 'pay for their jobs, serving as apprentices until they've mastered their craft'.[14] This report is not substantiated by other evidence, but it does illustrate a disparity in professionalism in the two locations. These different attitudes are evident in the writers' daily routine. Reynolds expressed surprise that in Britain, 'The writers work at home. Studios prefer it'.[15] Compare this to Casey Robinson's experience at Warner Brothers in Burbank: 'A writer was expected to appear at the studio at nine o'clock in the morning and leave at five o'clock'.[16] Efforts to professionalise screenwriting in Britain were laboured. While collectivity is a

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[9] This publication began as *The Screen Player Magazine*, a publication of the Screen Actors' Guild in March 1934. By August 1934, *The Screen Guilds' Magazine* was published jointly by the Screen Writers' Guild of the Author's League of America and The Screen Actors' Guild. By 1936, '*Guilds*' had become singular.

[10] John Paddy Carstairs, "Wanted in London," The Screen Guilds' Magazine September 18 1934: pp.25-26

[11] John Paddy Carstairs, "Not So Low-Down on London," The Screen Guild Magazine June 1936: p.24

[12] Harrington Reynolds, "Should I Got To England?," The Screen Guilds' Magazine May 1935: p.8

[13] Carstairs, "Not So Low-Down on London," p.24

[14] Paul Perez, "Lowdown London," The Screen Guilds' Magazine March 1935: p.17

[15] Reynolds, "Should I Got To England?," p.8

[16] Joel Greenberg, "Casey Robertson: Master Adaptor," in ed. Pat McGilligan, Backstory: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age (London: University of California Press, 1986), p.296

major step towards professionalism, the Screenwriters' Association was not formed in Britain until 1937, four years after the formation of the Writers' Guild of America (whose antecedents go back as far as 1921).[17] These working practices reflect the different conceptualisation of the script's role within the production process. The Hollywood writer clocks-in as part of the factory which produces films. He is a professional, expected to produce story as a film component during his shift. While many British manuals lauded the new screen 'art', American Dorothy Parker, one of the leaders of the Screen Writers' Guild, is reported to have said, 'We are not authors, we're just workers. Of course, our craft is a respectable one, just as the carpenter's craft, for instance, is respectable. You see, writing for films is just like doing crossword puzzles – except that to do crossword puzzles you have to have a certain knowledge of words'.[18] There is no symbolic capital associated with script production, unlike the autonomy granted to story in Britain, which emanates from the cultural capital associated with literary production, and the cultural status of artistic production as 'social magic'.[19] There was a continuous struggle within the British field to establish screenwriting as a legitimate form of literary production. American commentators noted how little prestige the British film industry granted the profession. Carstairs expressed concern that, 'too few producers realize the importance of the screenwriter proper…Experience in Hollywood studios convinces me that not only is there a complete lack of thought and care in the scenario of British films, but the lack of proportion is often amazing'.[20] Carstairs cites the script as the basis of American film excellence, and suggests the import of, 'a certain number of established American writers, writers who will co-operate with a British colleague in an attempt at a workmanlike Anglo-American screen play'.[21] The success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* [1933] in the USA, Alexander Korda's critical and popular hit, made such transatlantic cooperation seem viable, as some British producers targeted the US market. The result was a

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[17] Writers Guild of America West, History, 2007, http://www.wga.org/subpage_whoweare.aspx?id=1217, June 20 2007
[18] Dorothy Parker, "Are Film Writers Workers?," Pacific Weekly June 29 1936: p.371
[19] Butler, "Performativity's Social Magic"
[20] John Paddy Carstairs, "London Lowdown..." The Screen Guilds' Magazine January 1935: p.7
[21] Ibid. p.7

negotiation at the script level of differing values of story, storytelling and the role of the screenwriter.

However, this exchange in talent was not welcomed by all those working in Britain. By 1937, Buchanan complained that the imitation of Hollywood methods had led to, 'films being produced in Britain, as distinct from British films, that are but pale replicas of American productions'.[22] The results of classical Hollywood's production processes were clear to see on British screens. The higher production values, star packaging and stable production style lead to a privileging of classical Hollywood's technical methods amongst some in the British film industry. Hollywood knew how to sell its product, and the 'hokus pokus' stories maintained its core values of narrative and profit. Other production and narrative values existed in British cinema. The clash between these different valuations is illustrated by the institutionalised use of story as a commodity within the Warner Brothers' production process, particularly in their British operation at Teddington during the 1930s. British screenwriters working at Teddington attempted to reconcile their existing hierarchy of story values with the institutionalised American values, along with the internal and external politics which constituted the realities of the production process.

The Teddington studio was equipped with RCA sound and the latest lighting techniques in the early 1930s. Warner Brothers-First National Ltd. (WBFN) was registered as a private company with £1000 capital in August 1931.[23] Warner Brothers moved Irving Asher from their Burbank operation to act as Managing Director and Producer, while Doc Salomon was installed as Studio Manager. A two-year lease was originally taken, with £200,000 set aside for the first ten to twelve pictures. Jack Warner declared that all the Teddington productions were to be distributed on the American circuit, and that French versions would also be produced at the unit.[24] Asher outlined his commitment to story in an interview in 1939: 'the aim of every film producer should be to translate the action of everyday life into the films he makes. And if his pictures cannot be as dramatic as today's newspapers, he has little chance of holding his

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[22] Buchanan, Film Making, p.182
[23] Malcolm Newnam, "Teddington Studio Biography", (www.britmovie.co.uk/studios/teddington.biog00.html, 2000) 4 June 2007
[24] "Warners' £200,000 for British Productions." The Bioscope September 2 1931: p.16

audience in the cinema'.[25] He was also determined to make British films with transatlantic appeal. This brought him into conflict with the studio management, who were less interested in the quality of the Teddington product than they were of maintaining a careful profit.

On taking control of the studio, Asher had to close down the operation as he found the existing crew to be corrupt. One of the first films produced at Teddington was *Murder on the Second Floor*, directed by William McGann and scripted by staff writer Roland Pertwee. Asher was pleased with the positive reaction from the trade press, although he wrote to Warner to caution, 'It must be very difficult for you to see much merit in the production alongside of your perfectly produced American product, but I am positive that you understand the circumstances under which 'Murder' was produced'.[26] Meeting the needs of the quota dictated these circumstances. Films were made cheaply and quickly. *The Thirteenth Candle* commenced filming 13 February 1933 for delivery 25 March 1933, at a cost of one pound, two shillings per foot of film. *This Acting Business* commenced production on 4 September 1933 for delivery 15 November 1933 for the same price. *The Silver Spoon* commenced production on 16 October 1933 for delivery 31 December 1933 at a cost of only 19 shillings and sixpence per foot of film.[27] Over one hundred films were made at Teddington during the years of the quota. This level of production demanded a constant supply of story material. Asher noted the importance of good screenwriters, as 'inefficient writers would be more expensive to me than what I pay those whom I have'.[28] Over forty writers received screen credits for WBFN during the 1930s, including some of the best-known British screenwriters of the time, such as Frank Launder, Sidney Gilliat, AR Rawlinson, and Guy Bolton.

The terms of the Act demanded that the writer of the screenplay or scenario had to be a British citizen in order for the film to qualify for the quota. WBFN took on a number of British staff writers in order to meet the

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[25] R. Ewart Williams, "I Take My Plots from the Headlines, Says Irving Asher," Film Weekly 11 March 1939: p.18

[26] Irving Asher, "Letter to Jack Warner", January 8 1932, 4/4 12/23/31-12/10/34, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

[27] *The Silver Spoon* 12645B; *This Acting Business* 12646B; *The Thirteen Candles* 12646B, The Warner Brothers' Collection

[28] Asher, "Letter to Jack Warner", The Warner Brothers' Collection

requirements of the legislation, and there was a standard clause in the staff writers' contract ensuring that they held British citizenship. British staff writers and those on contract were brought into contact with the classical Hollywood machine. Grounded in a less stable screenwriting paradigm which encompassed elements of classical narrative, the literary tradition, and other disparate impulses, conflict in methods, story structure and values ensued. Warner expressed his dislike for staff writers John Hastings Turner and Roland Pertwee, suggesting Asher, 'get writers with "guts" instead of hanky panky ones, and I haven't confidence in Pertwee and Turner. They are too much of the drawing room type'.[29] Asher was able to lay off Turner for four weeks in January 1932, as Turner had a play on in the West End. He replaced him with Victor Kendall who had been working at British International Pictures. Asher was actively looking to replace Turner and Pertwee, who, when the unit opened in 1931, earned $725 per week in salary between them, a cost which represented the studio's most expensive item.[30] During the years of Warner Brothers' operation in Teddington, staff writers earned between £30 per week and £90 per week. The contracts were usually for 26 weeks, with WBFN holding an option to extend for a further 26 weeks, usually with a £10 per week increase in pay. There was a contractual obligation to write exclusively for WBFN during the contract period, and WBFN could specify no more than a two-week layoff without pay in every 26 weeks.

While the distance from Burbank provided Asher with a certain degree of autonomy, Doc Salomon ensured Jack Warner was kept abreast of developments. Salomon wrote to Warner every week.[31] The power struggle between Asher and Warner over the nature and aims of WBFN's output had a direct influence on story value within the studio. The studio conceived of story as an integral part of the production process, but it was a commodity just like set costs, or the electricity bill. The production of films within the studio was,

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[29] Warner, "Letter to Irving Asher"

[30] Irving Asher, "Letter to Jack Warner", December 23 1931, 4/4 12/23/31-12/10/34, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

[31] Discussing producer Jerry Jackson, Warner wrote, 'Of course no one knows you send me these letters, and while there isn't any harm, still say nothing to anyone, because I don't want Jackson to think you are spying on him, because you are not...After you read my letters, it is best to destroy them as you can't tell who may visit you, see the letter-head and draw the wrong conclusion.' Jack Warner, "Letter to Doc Salomon", May 10 1938, 59/10 - 2, Jack Warner Collection, Doheny Library, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

not much different from the manufacturing of automobiles. But there was one difference: Despite attempts at standardization, no picture could be *exactly* the same as another one on the assembly line. But similar formula elements – plots, incidents, characters – were used and then transposed from one genre to another: what worked in a Western could be used six months later in a gangster film. Twists, blends, and cross-pollinations were the rule. When the script of *They Drive by Night* seems to run out of steam, the solution is to move directly into the third act of *Bordertown*, made five years earlier.[32]

Such an attitude situated the screenwriter as a craftsman, working with story as a product, but not as an art form. There was nothing sacred or 'magical' about story within the Warners' factory. Formulaic elements were repeated so that the 'hokus pokus melodrama' produced successful pictures. Despite this pragmatic approach to story, it was seen within the studio as a key component of selling the motion picture. Producer Hal Wallis wrote to director Michael Curtiz imploring him, 'to get the story on the screen, and I don't care if you play it in front of black velvet! Just so you tell the story; because, if you don't have a story, all of the composition shots and all of the candles in the world aren't going to make you a good picture'.[33] The importance placed on story within the Warner Brothers' production process gave Asher difficulties in running the Teddington operation. He was required to produce a large quantity of films quickly and cheaply, but he was faced with a shortage of quality story material to film. While a number of story properties were original works by contracted writers, or adaptations of their literary production, Asher was still faced with a shortfall. He was encouraged to attend the theatre to watch every opening night in order to secure appropriate story rights for adaptation, before his competitors could acquire them.[34] However, by August 1933 the situation was critical. Asher wrote to Jack Warner and eastern story editor Jacob Wilk, requesting that he be allowed to raid Warner's New York and Burbank offices for appropriate story material. Warner's reply was indicative of his approach to story:

> Am very happy that you went over the story situation with Wilk and that he will be able to supply you with a great deal of material from New York. By all

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[32] Rudy Behlmer, ed., Insider Warner Bros. (1935-1951) (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1985), p.xiii

[33] Hal Wallis, 'Memo to Curtiz, August 28, 1935' in Behlmer ed., Inside Warner Bros., p.23

[34] Jack Warner, "Letter to Irving Asher", 18 September 1933, File 4/4 12/23/31-12/10/34, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

> means do this as we have a world of material and I see no reason why it should not be utilized. It will also mean the savings of a great many thousands of dollars.[35]

This reply is indicative of the studio's rating of the British operation. Cost savings are the primary concern, while the use of story material unfit for Hollywood production was allowed and encouraged in the British arm. The result of these story raids brought the contracted British writers at Teddington into direct contact with American story properties. They were forced to negotiate their differing values and story paradigms within the process of 'adapting' these scripts to meet the strictures of the quota. Asher felt this policy was successful, and by March 1934 he wrote, 'the product is 100% better than it has ever been, and I am six scripts ahead, which is the result of my trip there, and puts us in a better position than we would have been in'.[36] This exchange of story material was typical of the studio's approach to utilising assets. Errol Flynn was sent to Hollywood after his star value became apparent from appearing in *Murder at Monte Carlo* [1934 dir. Ralph Ince, sc. John Hastings Turner & Michael Barringer].[37] Asher sent the script of *Something Always Happens* [1934 dir. Michael Powell, sc. Brock Williams] to Warner as, 'the basis of a very good Cagney story. Naturally, we have done it in a very cheap manner, but I wrote the original story myself, and in its original form it was a typical Cagney'.[38] Asher's implicit concern is that the script be judged on its story values, with a view to an American production, rather than on the low production values of the original British product. He emphasises the quality of the story (as well as the acting) when discussing the film in the trade press: '"Something Always Happens" is based upon an original story which has many unusual twists in the telling of the tale, while the action of the plot plays itself against several conflicting backgrounds'.[39] This script does not appear to have been developed further in Burbank, but it does demonstrate the culture of transferability and reuse

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[35] Jack Warner, "Letter to Irving Asher ", August 1933, File 4/4 12/23/31-12/10/34, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles
[36] Irving Asher, "Letter to Jack Warner", March 20 1934, File 4/4 12/23/31-12/10/34, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles
[37] Newnam, "Teddington Studio Biography"
[38] Asher, "Letter to Jack Warner", January 8 1932, 4/4 12/23/31-12/10/34
[39] "Three British Films," Kinematograph Weekly June 14 1934: p.51

institutionalised within the Warner Brothers' operations in Teddington and the USA.

The different culture of screenwriting in Britain meant that story preparation was slightly different in British studios from their American counterparts. Roddick notes that in the 1930s, an American Warner Brothers' script was developed first by, 'a number of contract writers who worked on the preparatory stages, blocking out a structure and pinpointing certain key scenes before a single writer (or occasionally two writers) was allocated full-time'.[40] In Teddington, it appears that the story was worked on by one main writer, although often the property was first acquired or produced in a 'scenario' form, and then developed by the staff writer into a screenplay.[41] There are some instances of a specialist dialogue writer working on the script. This work was carried out under the guidance of the studio's Scenario Editor, initially American Russell Medcraft, and later Brock Williams.[42] The story contracts show that writers were encouraged to develop original story ideas whilst in the employment of WBFN, although the studio retained the copyright. While standard Hollywood practice utilised the continuity format after 1914, the style was not exported to Teddington immediately.[43] Script format at WBFN employed a division between story action and camera direction on the left side of the page, and dialogue and sound direction on the right side of the page. This format demarks a clear separation of the visual and the acoustic at the level of production, possibly to make clear on shooting the different technical responsibilities. It also suggests the differentiation of script roles, with the writers placing the action on the left side of the page, while a specialist dialogue writer used the right. This appears to have been standard scripting practice until around 1937, when there was an institutional convergence in practice, and the Teddington scriptwriters began to employ a continuity format.

The utilisation of American story material allowed the British writers to meet the speed and cost restrictions of quota production. *The Murder of Dr.*

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[40] Nick Roddick, A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Bros. in the 1930s (London: BFI, 1983), p.38

[41] The 'scenario' appears to be equivalent to the contemporary 'treatment' form – a present-tense, 'short-story' outlining of the story.

[42] Low, Film Making in 1930s Britain, p.191

[43] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.138

Harrigan [USA 1936, dir. Frank McDonald, sc. Sy Bartlett, Charles Beldon, Peter Milne, Robert Preswell) was brought over by Asher and reworked into *The Dark Stairway* [UK 1938, dir. Arthur B. Woods, sc. Basil Dillon, Brock Williams]. The story of *The Dark Stairway* follows a very similar narrative path to the American version. The reworking was made from the American script, although the original novel by E.M. Eberhardt was also consulted.[44] In the script reworking, entire sections of the original script were reused almost *verbatim*. Compare this section, where the use of point-of-view camera is specified as important to the withholding of story information:

> **US Version *The Murder of Dr. Harrigan* 1936 p.102**
>
> 210. OPERATING ROOM. CLOSE SHOT DOWN ON MELADY (This scene and subsequent scenes in Lambert's reconstruction are to be photographed from the angle of the murderer – in other words CAMERA IS THE UNKNOWN FIGURE.
>
> **UK Version *The Dark Stairway* 1938 p.135**
>
> 323. INT OPERATING THEATRE. CLOSE SHOT, shooting down on Cresswell (This and subsequent scenes in Thurber's reconstruction are to be photographed from the angle of the murderer. In other words the camera is the unknown figure. At no time must the murderer be established to be a man or a woman. Thurber's voice is overlayed and his description of the events is synchronised with the events themselves).[45]

This technical camera instruction is not only a story point, but also helps to establish the look and tone of the scene on screen. The appropriation of this script material is indicative of the way that story material was treated within the studio; as something to be reused, reworked or discarded as appropriate. Not only was story material copied in this way, but the script illustrates that actual footage of *The Murder of Dr. Harrigan* was recycled in the British version:

> 138. INT. HOSPITAL BASEMENT AT FOOT OF STAIRS and under LIFT CLOSE SHOT. A gigantic, distorted

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[44] FV Royce, "Letter to JJ Glyn, 'Stories'", September 8 1938, File 12546B "Take it From Me (Transatlantic Trouble)", Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

[45] *The Murder of Dr. Harrigan*, File 1891, Ibid.

> shadow is seen to move swiftly away from under the lift.
>
> (Stock from Harrigan picture)[46]

This combination of reusing story and picture material allowed the British writers to produce enough scripts to meet the demands of quota production. However, the speed and cost restriction demanded by working under such conditions impacted on practice. This reworking maintains Hollywood's (and Warner Brothers') core values of narrative and profit. The reuse of story and film saved both time and money in production. Classical Hollywood's narrative function is also preserved as time constraints meant that the British writers did not deviate greatly from the existing narrative structure created by the American scriptwriters. Lost in this system are values of originality, and an authorial voice of British production distinct from classical Hollywood. Such a process of borrowing and reusing hand-me-down story material might prove frugal financial policy, but the politics of writing for an American studio producing quota films stifled individual expression.

While his American raids allowed Asher to continue to operate successfully, his increasing frustration caused by operating under such financial limitations led to friction with his American masters. Asher campaigned to increase the cost and quality of WBFN's output. By 1934, he argued that

> During Griffith's trip to New York he will suggest to Morris and H.M. [Warner] that we increase the cost of our productions here, in an attempt to better our product, as the day of the Quota Quickies is now definitely ended, and if we continue to make cheap third rate product we will find ourselves suffering as great a loss as we did previous to our entering production, while, if we increase our cost a few thousand Pounds per picture – and this does not mean that we are to make £20,000 pictures or anything like it – we will find that we will be able to make saleable product that will be acceptable to all exhibitors. We have been proving this with the last few pictures we have made, where I went entirely against my instructions and over-stepped my authority in making a few pictures costing a little more money. The distribution have found these pictures very valuable, and will make a handsome profit on them, whereas the old cheapies that we have been knocking out will continue to be a loss.[47]

This increase in cost was intended to make better quality pictures at Teddington. Indeed, by spring 1935, reports in Los Angeles and in the British trade press

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Asher, "Letter to Jack Warner", November 21 1934

suggested that Warner Brothers were abandoning the production of cheap quota-quickies at Teddington in favour of higher quality productions.[48] However, such notices appeared periodically in the press, and while salving the industry and the public, they did not represent a change in production investment. The overriding value of the Teddington operation was not quality, nor narrative, but profit. In reply to Asher's letter, Warner explains,

> About the day of the quota 'quickies', as much as I would like to make better productions, it is something I must butt out of because you are so far away from here that it is humanly impossible for me to advise you on just what should be done. It all comes back to the profit and loss sheet. If the Exchanges can distribute films that will make a profit then they should spend a little more money.[49]

Asher continued to run the Teddington operation on a tight budget until 1938, and with little significant increase in production quality. The implementation of the second Cinematograph Films Act in 1938, coupled with financial over-stretching, led the British film industry to a period of cautious introspection. Warner Brothers responded by tightening their financial control over British production from New York. Sam Morris instructed Asher not to obligate the company for more than $25,000, and forbade him acquiring story material for a value greater than $1,000.[50] Asher's response was to resign via telegram, stating, 'Surely after seven years running studio I am capable judge what we can pay for material within our budget'.[51] The studio disagreed, and accepted his resignation. Jack Warner felt that Asher, 'is too big a man to make pictures at Teddington of the type we need and which we can stay in business with'.[52] Asher's desire to increase the quality of production to compete in the Anglo-American market clashed with the studio's foregrounding of profit over all other functions. For the writers working at Teddington, the realities of working within the quota meant

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[48] "Teddington Expansion," Kinematograph Weekly April 18 1935: p.43, "Teddington Studio Expansion," Kinematograph Weekly May 9 1935: p.12, "Warners to Quit Making Cheap Films in England," Los Angeles Times May 27 1935: p.15

[49] Jack Warner, "Letter to Irving Asher", December 10 1934, File 4/4 12/23/31-12/10/34, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

[50] Sam Morris, "Letter to Irving Asher", February 21 1938, File 1/4 2/21/38-8/14/39, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

[51] Irving Asher, "Cable to Sam Morris", March 1 1939, File 1/4 2/21/38-8/14/39, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

[52] Jack Warner, "Letter to Sam Morris", March 3 1938, File 1/4 2/21/38-8/14/39, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

responding to these often conflicting politics from the institutions and producers they worked with.

Such conflicting industrial demands were typical of the difficulties faced in practice by British screenwriters throughout the industry. Julius Hagen produced quota films at his Twickenham film studio. He focussed on cheap, fast productions. Indeed, the primary impulse of his production was speed, with story a distant second. Bernard Vorhaus recalls Hagen ripping pages from the middle of a script when a production ran behind.[53] However, British manuals encouraged neophyte writers to aim for quota productions. Norman Lee states that the writer will find, 'an open and eager market, and gain valuable experience of seeing his work on screen – however poorly represented'.[54] Screenwriters working within the quota were forced to negotiate conflicting story paradigms, along with a system which foregrounded speed, low budgets and profit above notions of quality and narrative. These conflicting discourses were brought into focus as British workers adapted American story material at Warner Brothers-First National. The way that they adapted such material, and the story choices that they made are indicative of how British writers negotiated these industrial and story demands in practice.

The Life of Jimmy Dolan [USA 1932, dir. Archie Mayo, sc. David Boehm and Erwin Gelsey; *The Kid's Last Fight* UK] was a Hollywood vehicle for Douglas Fairbanks Jr. The original play, *Sucker* by Bertram Millauser and Beulah Marie Dix, was registered at the Screen Writers' Guild under number 4377. Asher brought drafts of the script, the scenario and other story material to Teddington during the mid-1930s. Although never produced, several British staff writers reworked and developed the story through several drafts during 1937-1938, under production number 193.[55] The working title of the remake was *The Kid's Last Fight* – the same as the British release title of the original American film - although *The Baby Face Kid*, *Ringside #1* and *The Sucker* were also

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[53] Sidney Cole, Interview with Bernard Vorhaus, 1991, BECTU Oral History Project, - Interview 219, http://easbchrp2.eas.uea.ac.uk:8080/interviews/stoz/vorhaus, June 20 2007
[54] Lee, Money for Film Stories, pp.71-72
[55] Royce, "Letter to JJ Glyn, 'Stories'"

considered.[56] The way that this reworking occurred demonstrates how competing story paradigms were negotiated in practice by British screenwriters, along with politics of quality associated with the quota. The story choices demanded by working within the industrial, economic and social demands of the WBFN studio offers an insight into how screenwriting theory – articulated in the manuals – was applied in practice. The injection of a 'British' sensibility into this American story illustrates how British writers conceived of writing a distinctly 'British' film, and offers an insight into the relationship between different forms of classicisms existent in 1930s Anglo-American screenwriting. As discussed in Chapter 2, Cardwell's notion of adaptation as a gradual unfolding of a meta-text provides a more robust grounding when examining the process of story development within the studio system.[57]

The narrative unity of the original American production was commented upon in both American and British reviews. *Variety* described *The Life of Jimmy Dolan* as, 'a neat, sure-footed picture that's easy on the eye and ear'.[58] *Picturegoer Weekly* stated that the story, 'sounds all rather conventional but actually its treatment is original and all the characters exceedingly well drawn'.[59] *Kinematograph Weekly* stated that, 'although conventional in theme, the picture departs from the orthodox in treatment, and is particularly strong in human interest'.[60] These reviewers note the story organisation, which is based firmly within the classical Hollywood paradigm. There is a strong sense of narrative being propelled by a series of character-motivated actions and causal reactions, which is praised by the reviewers. The climax is action-orientated, and determined by the protagonist's major dramatic choice. This choice is foreshadowed in the opening of the film. As a classical Hollywood product, it is a paradigmatic example of Warner's 'hokus pokus melodrama'. The Teddington reworking loses some of the unified narrative organisation in an attempt to add specifically British themes to the story, which does result in a number of scenes which Warner would describe as 'drawing-room romance'. The British writers

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[56] The property was remade in the USA in 1939 under the title *They Made Me a Criminal* [dir. Busby Berkley, sc. Sig Herzig].
[57] Cardwell, Adaptation Revisited
[58] "The Life of Jimmy Dolan," Variety June 20 1933: p.11
[59] Lionel Collier, "On Screens Now," Picturegoer Weekly September 23 1933: p.26
[60] "Reviews for Showmen," Kinematograph Weekly March 30 1933: p.17

eschew the core classical Hollywood values of narrative and profit in favour of other values in practice.

The basic story is as follows: the film opens at a middleweight boxing bout, where the hero, in both cases a left-handed fighter with a distinctive stance named Jimmy, wins his fight. He has a clean-cut public image, which belies his private vices. Jimmy wears a piece of jewellery on his right hand. A reporter dies (killed by Jimmy in the US version; killed by Jimmy's manager in the UK version) and Jimmy is setup by his manager to take the blame. Jimmy runs. In the meantime and unbeknownst to Jimmy, the manager, wearing Jimmy's jewellery, dies in a firey car accident, so he is mistakenly identified as Jimmy by the jewellery. Hungry and tired Jimmy escapes to the country, where he is taken into a private residence (a farm in the US version; a country house in the UK). During his stay, and through a burgeoning romance with the owner's daughter Jane, Jimmy discovers the meaning of love and sacrifice. Jimmy enters a fight in order to win the money to save her and her family from their creditors, but has to reveal his distinctive left-handed stance to avoid being knocked-out, which he does, and thus gives himself away to the police. However, the policeman, having seen how much Jimmy has changed, turns a blind eye, and Jimmy can be reunited with Jane and live happily ever after.

While the story remains fundamentally the same, there are significant changes in scene, theme and narrative organisation in the British version, particularly in the climax and resolution. By examining and attempting to account for some of these changes, the different hierarchy of story values which existed in British screenwriting might be discerned. Despite Asher's ambition, Teddington productions were made specifically for the domestic market. Warner made this clear in a letter of 1935: 'do not spend under any condition any money that we cannot recoup in Great Britain alone and do not give any thought to the probable income in America because this is so uncertain we do not want to bank on it whatsoever.'[61] While this edict stifled Asher's ambition and budget, it did mean that the script could be reworked without concession to the international

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[61] Jack Warner, "Letter to Irving Asher", July 8 1935, File 3/4 2/15/35-12/14/35, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

market. The resulting script privileged 'British' themes over the existing unity of narrative organisation.

The American script is organised to build to Jimmy's climatic decision in the final scene: does he adopt his 'southpaw' stance to win the contest and save the farm, but give himself away to the police; or does he remain anonymous but fail the kids and his love interest? The narrative is designed to bring the audience to this moment. The protagonist's climactic decision is foreshadowed in the opening sequence of the US script:

FADE IN ON

CLOSE SHOT OF POSTER

on side of brick wall. The poster reads:

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN September 1st
AL LEWIS VS. JIMMY DOLAN
WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE WORLD

The Challenger

(picture)

Southpaw Jimmy Dolan

CAMERA TRUCKS BACK revealing two kids, one about twelve, the other eight. They are badly dressed – knickers unloosed, shoes unlaced, one with cap, the other with-out, faces dirty…Newspapers carelessly carried by the younger of the kids – the older one puts up his left arm, trying to demonstrate Southpaw Jimmy Dolan's position.

NEWSPAPER KID:
(contemptuously)
Naw, that ain't the way.
(dropping his papers)
This is the way he stands. Right hand out. He's a cockeye. This way. Right hand out.

He takes this position and jabs with his right at the other's chin. The taller kid changes his position and extends his right hand.

KID:
Ain't that what I'm doing?

NEWSPAPER KID:
Yeah – now you are. Now you're doing it.

CAMERA MOVES up to CLOSE SHOT of poster[62]

This switch from a conventional to a 'cockeye' stance is repeated in the final sequence, as Jimmy decides to change in order to win the fight, but he gives himself away to the policeman Phlaxer. However, such an action demonstrates his reformed character, and Phlaxer lets him go to leave an upbeat resolution. This story follows the redemptive character arc of Jimmy. At the beginning of the story he is an aggressive, manipulative drinker and murderer. By the end he has been redeemed by the love of Jane and the kids. His powerful left-handed punch provides the tool for the narrative's inciting incident - he strikes and kills the reporter - as well as for the narrative resolution at the end. It is a neat, unified instance of narrative organisation.

In the British reworking, the use of Jimmy's 'southpaw' stance is not deployed so neatly as a narrative resource. The screenplay opens with the fight, and Jimmy conspiring with his new manager McCarthy to increase the odds on him winning. The importance of his 'southpaw' style is not indicated as clearly and as early as in the American version. Once the odds on Jimmy have lengthened, he takes advantage of them by winning in the next round. His distinctive stance is not identified until page four of the screenplay:

MEDIUM SHOT of the RING as the bell goes.

The two fighters come together. It's clear immediately that this round is another story.

Jimmy's left-hand stance is working now to the confusion of the other boy.

CLOSE TWO-SHOT – same two men at ring-side.

1st Man:
That's more like it, Kid – come on – Fisher can't even find you.

2nd Man:
Nobody can when that left-hand is working.[63]

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[62] *The Life of Jimmy Dolan* aka *The Kid's Last Fight*, File 2031, Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

In both scripts, this important narrative information is dealt with as exposition. However, in the American script, the information is reinforced by the character action, the dialogue and camera movement. In the British version, it is not presented until page four, along with other expository information (Jimmy's gambling, his relationship with his mother, his age), and its importance is diluted. Jimmy's switch to 'southpaw' acts in both scripts as a dangling clause, like Chekhov's gun: the question is immediately posed as to when 'the gun will be fired', and Jimmy will reveal himself.[64] In the US version, this decision is made on page 124 – it is the defining action which leads directly to the narrative resolution. In the UK version, Jimmy reveals himself in the second act, page 85. Once Jimmy has made his decision and switched to 'southpaw', the unified action setup in the opening sequence is complete and closed. There are no more major decisions for Jimmy to make; it ends the causal chain of action motivated by his character. In the American version, the end of this storyline indicates the end of the film. In the British version, the remaining 50 pages of script are driven not by Jimmy's desire, but by those of a secondary character – the police inspector, who decides to allow Jimmy to have his last fight. In addition, a number of small changes to narrative organisation throughout the script complicates the resolution. Unlike the American version, in the UK version, Jimmy does not kill the reporter, although he believes he did. It is likely that this is in response to potential censorship interference. Unusually for a pre-code film, Jimmy's criminal actions go unpunished in the American version. This is offset by the redemptive transformation in his character. There is internal change, and redemption, but not justice. In the 1938 British reworking, it is unlikely that a central protagonist's criminal action would be passed by the censorship board without justice being seen to be served. Because Jimmy does not kill the reporter, the dramatic stakes are reduced. Even if Jimmy does not know he is innocent, the audience does. The story does not end after the final climactic boxing match. The policeman arrests Jimmy, and he goes to court. There, his ex-girlfriend, and witness to the murder, refuses to clear him. Jimmy is sentenced, only for the ex-girlfriend to be run over by a taxi, her diary found, and Jimmy cleared. The dramatic power of the story is reduced by a series of implausible, non-motivated

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[64] Koteliansky, ed., Anton Tchekhov: Literary and Theatrical Reminiscences p.23

twists. Justice is seen to be served, but closure is obtained by coincidence and a resolution caused by *deus ex machina* not through motivated character action.

Rather than following a direct line of action which leads to Jimmy's dramatic decision whether or not to reveal himself, the British version introduces a series of subplots indirectly related to this central story, but which illustrate a number of themes. These themes add a number of British cinematic preoccupations to the reworking of this American story, which might be dismissed by Warner as 'drawing room romance and sophistication'. These story choices demonstrate the different screenwriting paradigm which the British writers occupy in practice. The first story change is in the setting, when Jimmy escapes to the country. In the American script, Jimmy goes to a Utah farm. In the British version, Jimmy stumbles upon a country house, and the second act setting is split between this house and the countryside surrounding it. This type of setting is typical of the 'heritage film', which was particularly bankable domestically. Higson notes of the heritage film that,

> Most of them are set for at least part of the time in the sorts of building and landscapes which are now conserved by bodies such as the National Trust and English Heritage, and these settings are generally inhabited by familiar aristocratic English types and the values and lifestyles they bring with them. Those characters are often performed by actors better known for their prestigious theatre work than their film acting. The iconography of the genre is completed by the rich *mise-en-scene* of the antique collector, with its tasteful period décor, furniture, and ornaments.[65]

Higson identifies two main elements of the heritage film: the setting and the inhabitants, which allow the iconography of the genre to be showcased in production. These preoccupations were added in the reworking of the script, and are illustrative of the screenwriting paradigm within which British screenwriters were situated. The story choices made in practice by the British screenwriters demonstrate the values and advice propounded in the screenwriting manuals as different to the norms of classical Hollywood storytelling.

The decision to make the setting an English country house inhabited by these 'familiar aristocratic types' seems like a thought-out choice. In the American version, the Utah farm is inhabited by the love interest, her mother,

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[65] Higson, Waving the Flag, p.27

and a coterie of wise-cracking orphans, who provide comedy and elicit sympathy from the audience and Jimmy. Their function within the narrative organisation is to illustrate different aspects of Jimmy – the central protagonist's – character. From the time that Jimmy arrives on the farm (p.49), until the beginning of the fight sequence (p.97), he is in every scene except a two-page scene where the policeman (Phlaxer) arrives in town. He learns about generosity from Gramma, about being a role-model from the children, and about love from Jane. These aspects are revealed so that at the climax Jimmy has to choose whether to accept these new aspects of his reformed character, or whether to revert to his original type and avoid being a 'sucker' at all costs. The narrative is organised within the classical Hollywood paradigm; all story resources are subordinated to character-motivated causality, which build directly from the inciting incident to the protagonist's major drama choice at the climax with minimum redundancy.

The British version does not follow such a rigid deployment of narrative resources. The second act story is inhabited by a series of equally 'familiar' types: the hen-pecked drunken Father, the overbearing Mother, the prissy sister, and the pompous suitor who acts as the antagonist in the love story. Rather than acting as a function of the protagonist's character, their function is to illustrate a number of themes. Jimmy arrives in the country at p.39, and leaves for the fight on p.96. In between emerges a 'class' subplot in which Jimmy does not appear, and which does not impact upon the central narrative arc. Jimmy is not onscreen on pages 49-54, 56-59 and 66-75. This subplot involves the extrication of Jane from her proposed marriage to Stirling, a pompous upper-class prospective Conservative candidate for Parliament. Simon is Jane's harried, eccentric father, who offends Stirling, prompting her release from the engagement. This scene takes place in a sitting room, and narrative progression is subordinated to what almost amounts to a series of variety hall jokes at the upper-class characters' expense.

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                MRS. GRANVILLE (in a low tone)
Simon – I've told you three times to leave this
punch bowl.

                SIMON
Why?
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MRS. GRANVILLE
Do you want your guests to talk?

SIMON:
They've been babbling like geese for hours now
– a little more won't hurt them.

These sections typify the 'drawing room romance and sophistication' Warner railed against. This subplot is technically a love triangle, a sound dramatic technique where two characters compete for the same desire (in this case, the third character). It could present an obstacle to the romantic subplot of Jane and Jimmy being together. However, the writers never place the two rivals together. Rather, this obstacle is removed when Stirling and Simon quarrel, and Stirling calls off the wedding. The character motivation is not strongly constructed. Rather than propelling the narrative by creating a causal effect, this action simply removes an obstacle for the main character, without necessitating Jimmy having to act himself. This subplot is neatly, if unbelievably closed as Jane's proposed marriage to Stirling is transferred to her sister. The story organisation goes against the classical maxim of economy, as other story resources and characters are used to resolve the central narrative complication. The marriage subplot has little bearing on the primary story arc. It is a short, largely self-contained sequence which adds comic relief to the main story, but is more akin to the variety-style conceptualisation of story structure than to a classical structure. While in itself the subplot follows classical narrative plotting – it is strongly closed, moves forward and there is little redundancy – in relation to the story as a whole, the entire subplot is largely extraneous.

However, unlike the classical Hollywood conception of the original story, which follows the story of a single protagonist, the use of ensemble characters, and the greater distribution of story material among these characters situates the British reworking within the paradigm of the theatrical and literary traditions. In addition to the marriage subplot, there is also a subplot involving Jimmy's two managers – the good, old manager, and the corrupt new manager who sets him up. Part of the story, and part of Jimmy's redemptive story arc, involves a reconciliation with the old manager. The final fight saves not only the house, but also the old manager's career. By 'sharing' the story material amongst the characters, the British reworking of the story rejects classical Hollywood's focus

on the single protagonist which feeds into the economically entrenched star system. *The Life of Jimmy Dolan* was conceived as a vehicle for Douglas Fairbanks Jr., with the fighting and training scenes designed to exploit his 'star' athleticism. The British reworking would require a similar performance, but also allows for a starring comic performance from the actor playing Simon. Indeed, Simon's character arc is almost as developed as Jimmy's: from hen-pecked husband stifled by his marriage and class expectations, to becoming free from financial and personal burden. Such a narrative organisation illustrates the British screenwriters' inclination to foreground other important story impulses over the institutionalised forms of classical Hollywood composition.

The second theme expounded within the British reworking of the story is the use of buildings and landscape – the National Trust Home as Higson has it. The British writer clearly envisaged this kind of stately home as a setting. The directions read:

> CLOSE SHOT – GATES – NIGHT
> On the gates is the name Fowley Park
>
> FULL SHOT – NIGHT – the house is lit up[66]

While only a brief shot, and perhaps appearing onscreen for only a second or so, the instruction that the 'house is lit up' indicates a use of the setting as uniquely British spectacle. The heritage elements provide non-narrative pleasures for the audience. In addition, there are a number of scenes located outside in the British countryside. Simon and Jimmy first meet as Simon has left the country house and is living in a caravan. Jimmy remains in and around the caravan during the second act. Terry Morden notes, 'in Britain, the pastoral has a particular resonance. It lies deep within the national consciousness, providing the dominant and enduring image of the British land'.[67] The British reworking of the story utilises this image as an attempt to inject a quality of 'Britishness' into the adaptation. At the same time, the themes of money, class and happiness are examined through a juxtaposition of pastoral and urban locations. Jimmy lives in

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[66] *The Kid's Last Fight*, p.54
[67] Terry Morden, "The Pastoral and the Pictorial," Ten 8 12(1983): p.19

a corrupt unsavoury environment in the city, but he finds insight and happiness while in the country. These themes are explored in a scene where Jimmy and Simon have left the country house and find themselves in a gypsy encampment. The importance of the countryside resonates in this scene.

MEDIUM SHOT of GROUP AROUND FIRE.

A man with a guitar is singing softly and some of the group are joining in from time to time. Others are drinking and eating. A short way from the group, Simon and Jimmy are sitting together.

MEDIUM CLOSE TWO SHOT – JIMMY and SIMON

SIMON: (talking lazily):
Maybe I'm easy to please, but
I don't want anything more out
of life than just this.

JIMMY
If anyone had told me six
weeks ago I'd be happy sitting
out here in the country listening
to some mug singing out of tune,
I'd have thought them crazy.
(SINCERELY) But now I feel like
you do about it.

SIMON: (listening
attentively):
He is a bit out of tune, isn't he?

JIMMY
What's the difference, he's happy.[68]

Higson notes that the image of the nation is achieved in the heritage film through the 'stress on the plural, the social, on what Grierson called the cross-section, which thus sets such films against the individual ethic of Hollywood cinema. The community of the nation is very often imagined from the point of view of pastorialism, the dominant mobilizing myth of the British people'.[69] This stress on the plural is illustrated in the setting as well as in the story organisation. This change of setting corresponded to the tropes propounded in British screenwriting pedagogy which represented a cinematic representation of 'Britain'. Such utilisation of these themes demonstrate the deployment in practice of a

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[68] *The Kid's Last Fight*, pp. 81-82
[69] Higson, Waving the Flag, p.274

specifically British screenwriting paradigm esteemed in theory. For example, Brunel suggests the following backgrounds for British films:

> *A Day in the Life of a Market Town*
> *Summer-Time in Shropshire*
> *Trades in Five Towns*
> *Life on a Farm*
> *A Drama of the Canals* [70]

The British reworking of *The Life of Jimmy Dolan* demonstrates in practice the importance of place and theme in British story composition. This re-conceptualisation situates the British screenwriter's story paradigm as knowingly distinct from the norms of classical Hollywood. The foregrounding of theme – setting and class – suggests that a discrete, if unstable, system of story values articulated in the screenwriting manuals did disseminate from its meta-critical position into practice. These values are defined partly in opposition to, and negotiation with classical Hollywood, partly from the structures of classical narrative, and partly as incorporating other impulses, all of which create a distinctly British script reworking.

When assessing the quality of screenwriting practice, an understanding of the production context is vital. Equally, a grasp of the competing screenwriting paradigms of story construction is important. There is a constant flow between theory and practice, particularly in British screenwriting as the theoreticians are often also practitioners. The exchange of talent and the physical presence of the Hollywood studios, along with the undeniable success of their product brought the stable classical Hollywood screenwriting style to Britain. Similarly, the fallout from the quota led to an increase in production and scriptwriting opportunities, even if the prime value became speed and fiscal economy rather than story. The field's response was varied in theory, and a careful negotiation in practice. The importance of theme, of class, of the collective as demonstrated in the reworking of *The Kid's Last Fight* shows a series of uniquely British cinematic preoccupations, expressed in a narrative organisation which favours

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[70] Brunel, Film Craft, p.1

these other impulses. While the script breaks the classical narrative paradigm as much as the classical Hollywood one, the introduction of other impulses into an American script illustrates the existence of an identifiable, British screenwriting paradigm even if it is not as stable, complete or identifiable as its classical Hollywood cousin.

The quality of this adaptation remains in question. Judged by contemporary standards, where script readers are immersed in the long established doxa of classical Hollywood scripting, or even by Warner Brothers American script standards of the 1930s, the British reworking of *The Kid's Last Fight* is too easily dismissed as 'drawing room romance and sophistication'. But to judge it by another set of standards, a hierarchy of values established and propounded within British screenwriting in the 1930s, more 'quality' might be seen. This focus on its themes does make this script a distinctly 'British film' rather than simply 'a film made in Britain' (an accusation of which *The Dark Stairway* may be guilty). The narrative, while certainly not unified, economical and perhaps not particularly cinematic, is certainly British. Considering the politics, restraints and conditions of production, there may be some quality in that.

The hierarchy of compositional values contested in the screenwriting manuals and defined in practice were further challenged by the institutionalisation of the star system and the coming of sound. Both had serious implications for the hierarchy of values espoused by British screenwriting, as well as practical implications for how screenplays were conceptualised, constructed and received. They further complicated the struggle to define a distinct normative practice in the field where other competitive screenwriting paradigms were culturally and economically dominant.

Chapter 5: Writing for the Stars: Negotiating the Star System in British Screenwriting Practice

> Until now wise-cracks have spluttered, stars have posed, and stories have moved slickly. To-day cinema-goers are demanding that actors and actresses shall behave and talk as human beings, instead of parading as themselves through film after film.[1]
>
> Frank Launder

The star system had been an integral component of classical Hollywood production since the early 1920s. The mid- to late-1920s saw the first serious British attempts to produce domestic stars.[2] The star system attenuated the risks associated with film production, as stars sold films independently of other filmic qualities. Jeffrey Richards argues that 1930s' British audiences were attracted primarily by stars, rather than by storylines.[3] British studios attempted to create their own stars as part of a broad strategy to compete with Hollywood production. Stars played an important part in film production, distribution and exhibition, managing audience expectations. British stars were imbued with a form of patriotic capital to distinguish the films they appeared in from Hollywood products. Dyer differentiates between stars as a 'phenomenon of production' (part of the economic control of the film industry), and as a 'phenomenon of consumption' (the meaning represented by the stars to audiences).[4] With a few notable exceptions, approaches to stardom have tended to focus on star image and meaning without discussing the industry that produces them.[5] My concern is not in explaining the origins, meanings, or preferences of stardom, rather it is in exploring how the screenwriting field negotiated the institutionalisation of the star system in British cinema as an economic phenomenon with implications for screenwriting practice. These issues were

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[1] Brown, Launder and Gilliat, p.9
[2] Sedgwick, "Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s"
[3] Jeffrey Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace, Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)
[4] Richard Dyer, Stars (London: BFI, 1998), pp.10-11
[5] cf. Paul McDonald, The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities (London: Wallflower, 2000)

addressed in British screenwriting manuals, which provided a discursive response to the demands placed on the field. Central to this response was addressing the tension between the star system and the field's valuation of story. The exploitation of the star as an economic imperative forced an uneasy negotiation between the values articulated in the manuals and star demands, as the field attempted to preserve story value within this system of practice. Unlike the classical Hollywood approach which utilised the star system as part of a stable system of practice, supporting its narrative and profit motive, the star system challenged many of British screenwriting's core values. The profit motive the star system represented forced the field to integrate it into screenwriting practice. However, the manuals' response to the desirability of this, and the practical implications of how it was to be achieved was neither unified nor stable.

The manuals formed a theory of practice which outlines how the screenwriter should utilise the star in screenplay composition. Sedgwick argues that under the star system, the star is rendered a form of human capital; they have certain personality traits which are not easily reproduced or replaced.[6] The screenwriter creates a product – a screenplay – which exploits that capital and those traits. A screenplay which does so successfully reduces the risks of production. It becomes more likely that the screenplay will be bought and produced under such circumstances. However, such an exploitation requires specific story properties and narrative organisation. There must be a sense of 'fit' – perfect or imperfect – between the existing star image and the character, world and story events of the screenplay.[7] The manuals produced a theory of practice as to how the connotations of stardom might be understood by screenwriters, and how such a sense of 'fit' should be exploited in a screenplay. The manuals also addressed the implication of the star system on other aspects of story, such as the representation of national characteristics, or the integration of stage and variety traditions. Finally, the star system demanded a particular type of narrative organisation in order to maximise the exploitation of the star's character traits. Bordwell argues that narrative cinema consists of three systems: narrative logic

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[6] John Sedgwick, Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2000), p.180

[7] Dyer, Stars, p.129

(definition of events, causal relations between events), the representation of time (order, duration, repetition), and the representation of space (composition, orientation etc.). In classical Hollywood cinema, narrative causality operates as the dominant system, making temporal and spatial systems vehicles for it.[8] Similarly, British screenwriting's prime value was story, although not so clearly articulated as a causal system.[9] The star system creates tension between the primacy of story/causal narrative systems, and temporal and spatial systems. Screen time and space must be allotted in order to exploit the star's unique traits. The star's act/traits/looks are privileged by the allocation of screen time above other story elements; narrative is organised to place the star in the situation/location/event in which their traits can be exploited. The screenwriter must integrate these temporal and spatial demands within the story or causal narrative system in order to maintain the existing hierarchy of compositional values. This hierarchy was challenged when economic exploitation of the star overrode story/narrative demands in practice. These demands construct a storytelling paradigm based on economic imperative, but without attempting to hide the construct, or make its economic basis appear 'natural'. Morin notes,

> The internal characteristics [of the star system] are the very ones of grand-scale industrial, mercantile and financial capitalism. The star system is first of all a fabrication. This is the word chosen instinctively by Carl Laemmle, the inventor of the stars: 'the fabrication of the stars is the fundamental thing in the film industry'.[10]

All storytelling paradigms are fabrications which support a hierarchy of values. Screenplays which utilise the star system maintain classical Hollywood's twin concerns of narrative and profit. The primary narrative demand is to provide screen time and space for the star to demonstrate their unique traits. Bordwell states that, 'the star reinforced the tendency towards strongly profiled and unified characterisation', specifically in relation to the existing collection of traits and images in the cinematic and extra-cinematic discourses which constitute

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[8] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.12
[9] Gledhill, Reframing British Cinema, pp.151-154
[10] Edgar Morin, The Stars, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p.134. Quoted in Dyer, Stars pp.12-13

stardom.[11] While stars themselves are subject to mythologizing discourses – 'a star is born' — the arbitrariness of the star system's demands upon screenwriting practice is recognised as economically based. Unlike other tenets of the classical Hollywood storytelling paradigm such as unity, economy and closure, the commercial basis of the star system remains unmasked. While stars were never a guarantee of success, their popularity amongst audiences sustained classical Hollywood's industrial model as a whole. The British star system was less efficiently developed, but became more so during the 1930s. British screenwriting, and screenwriting manuals were increasingly forced to address the constructs of the star system, and integrate Hollywood norms, or develop indigenous conventions of practice.

The British film industry developed a star system from small beginnings. Richards notes that, 'Britain seemed almost incapable of creating and developing its own stars from scratch'.[12] Personalities were transferred from the stage and the variety hall.[13] These imports added to the concern that British cinema's specificity as a medium was under threat from a variety of extraneous sources. Distrust of the stage was common in British cinematic discourses, and the sentiment was often reciprocated.[14] However, the star system became increasingly institutionalised as an economic system with resulting narrative demands. The screenwriting manuals of the period negotiated these industrial demands by proposing conventions of practice in relation to three main areas: the star system as an economic phenomenon (the realities of working and selling screenplays within this paradigm); the star system's impact on story properties (cinematic specificity, how a 'fit' was to be achieved in practice, and alternatives to the star system); and meeting the narrative organisation demanded by this industrial form. This chapter examines how manuals created discourses of negotiation, influenced by and influencing both theory and practice, while attempting to preserve and maintain the hierarchy of values the British field held to be important. It is followed in the next chapter by a case study of comedian

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[11] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.14
[12] Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace, p.172
[13] Sarah Street, British National Cinema (London: Routledge, 1997), p.121
[14] Jon Burrows, Legitimate Cinema, Theatre Stars in Silent British Films, 1908-1918 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003)

Max Miller, whose star persona was exploited by Warner Brothers during a series of films made during the 1930s. Comedians and comic actors were amongst the most popular British stars, and the techniques of transferring Miller's (often blue) stage act on to screen will be examined.[15] This will explore how screenwriters negotiated the industrial demands of the star system in practice. It also examines questions of national specificity, the transference of stars from the variety hall to the screen, and the negotiation of censorship regulations.

While the star system had its economic advantages, it was not universally popular with the screenwriters who had to work within its boundaries. The star system threatened story as the prime screenwriting value. The institutionalisation of the star system in Hollywood during the early 1920s was regarded with a degree of suspicion in Britain. Gledhill argues that British cinema in the 1920s privileged story as the prime value amongst other concerns.[16] Maurice Elvey debated the merits of a British star system, arguing that at Stoll's, 'we have made it our habit to film a story, and not a personality…there is an infinite variety in novels, and a big story is immeasurably better than a big star'.[17] This is contrasted with Hollywood's attitude, highlighted by Fawcett in 1927, noting that the average American producer, 'is willing often to sacrifice good story treatment, even story itself, to the exploitation of the star'.[18] However, this realignment of values was unpopular with some American screenwriters: Clara Beranger complained that the star system handicapped her work, forcing dramatic values to be changed to suit the stars.[19] The system worked by managing audience expectation. The audience is aware of the story elements associated with a star's traits – romance, action, comedy. By promoting a film using that star persona, the producer creates a contract with the audience, who will buy the film under the assumption that the story elements will meet their expectation. In doing so, story elements become a function of the star's salient

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[15] Sedgwick, Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain, p.192
[16] Gledhill, Reframing British Cinema, pp.151-154
[17] Stoll's Editorial News, August 5 1920, p.7, quoted in Pepper, The Technique of the Photoplay, p.19
[18] L'Estrange Fawcett, Films, Facts and Forecasts (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1927), pp.169-170
[19] Clara Beranger, in ed. John C. Tibbetts, Introduction to the Photoplay: 1929 - a contemporary account of the transition to sound in film (Shawnee Mission, Ka.: National Film Society, 1977), pp.143-144

traits. In Britain, Buchanan stated that, 'the perfect film should contain no stars', but pragmatically conceded their role in a film's commercial success, while refusing to advocate the abolition of the star system as 'unnecessarily "highbrow," and indeed impossible'.[20] In their manuals, both Buchanan and Brunel cite Russian filmmakers' successful use of non-professional actors to question the necessity of the star system in Britain.[21] Such objections are summarised by Allen, who stated that, 'it may not be the acme of artistry for the film stars to play one type of part and that type only, but it is the pinnacle of commercial achievement, both for them and their exploiters'.[22] The period between the world wars witnessed the increasing prevalence of the star system within British cinema, and with it the uneasy negotiation that screenwriters faced between commercial and artistic demands. Unlike the rise of other industrial forms – sound, the quota, classical Hollywood's narrative organisation – the justification for the star system was most brazenly economic. While existing notions of quality resided in the value of story, increasingly star values overrode story concerns. British screenwriters and screenwriting manuals attempted to formulate a theory of practice which accommodated the star system, while maintaining story values.

However, the British manuals acknowledged that screenwriting success is linked to financial return. More than other forms of literary composition, screenwriting has a commercial aspect. The screenplay, a finished literary product in its own right, is never fully realised unless produced on screen. This necessarily demands a commercial investment, from which backers expect a financial return. The titles chosen for the manuals indicate their mercantile aims. In Britain, Norman Lee published *Money for Film Stories*. The American manuals exploited the demands of exchange in their titles: Marion published *How to Write and Sell Film Stories*, Lane *The New Technique of Screen Writing: A Practical Guide to the Writing and Marketing of Photoplays*, Sheridan *Why Your Scenario Doesn't Sell, and How you Can Make It,* while articles such as Kyne's 'How I Made a Million in the Movies' were common. In his manual, Buchanan questions the value of the star, stating that, 'People always praise or

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[20] Buchanan, Films, pp.222-223
[21] Brunel, Film Production, p.49, Buchanan, Films, p.222
[22] Allen, How to Write a Film Story, pp.79-80

condemn the star, whereas the reason for her success or failure is in the ability of the director, *who is the invisible star behind every production*'.[23] While the validity of this comment may be debated, the public perception at the time was based on star value, rather than directorial input. Recognising the star system as the prime compositional value is no less a construction than placing story at the hierarchical apex. The position of these manuals when advocating the use of the star system is to aid the sale of a screenplay to a professional film firm. While amateur or purely 'artistic' filmmaking can disregard the profit motif, the professional screenwriter must engage with the market. During this period, such an engagement increasingly required narrative composition based on star value. Such professionalism clashes with the popular ideal of the writer as artist, whose economic disinterestedness acts as a marker of social identity. This locates the artist as uninterested in money, and as such able to 'tell the truth' about the field. However, this notion is a construction, as the artist depends upon gatekeepers (Government grants, sponsorship, film producers) in order to fund or sell their art. As Virginia Woolf noted at the time, the realities of being a female novelist required £500 a year and a room of one's own.[24] This sentiment, starkly realised in the commercial and professional demands of writing for the star system, reveals the illusion of artistic production, especially in the cinema. Since screenwriters depend upon film producers buying and commissioning their work, they accommodate the requirements of the producer, who in turn is attempting to second-guess the market. In short, screenwriters self-censor. Bourdieu notes that, 'every expression is an accommodation between an *expressive interest* and a *censorship* constituted by the field in which that expression is offered'.[25] As such, the social magic of artistic production – the 'symbolic capital' of creation – is revealed as having an economic imperative. The increasing professionalisation of screenwriting in Britain, and the unabashedly commercial basis of the star system, exposes this exchange. This was not comfortably accepted by some in the field who conceptualised cinema more as an art than as industry. However, as the star system became increasingly institutionalised due to its economic success,

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[23] Buchanan, Film Making, p.59
[24] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (Granada, 1977)
[25] Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, p.90

British screenwriting had to address the practicalities of working within the system.

While some saw accommodating such commercial demands as limiting narrative composition, making films with a smaller audience imposes its own restrictions, and as McKee notes today, 'if the audience shrinks, the budget must shrink'.[26] There was an impulse in the British manuals to limit the ambition of screenplays in order to ensure story values were maintained. Brunel advised, 'Far better to have only three sets in a six-reel production and make your people and your story interesting than scramble through a score of backgrounds that have to be "dressed" and lit and finally littered with lifeless figures that mean nothing'.[27] The well-told story is valued above the expensive spectacle of using several sets. Brunel justifies this advice as necessary to meet the time and cost restrictions of a filming schedule. In order to encourage a filmmaking paradigm outside of such constraints, Brunel turned his advice towards the amateur film movement. He notes that, 'professional pictures are made for profit and for nothing else…amateurs can afford to experiment and show us the way to better things'.[28] Amateur production can afford to ignore the narrative restrictions imposed by the profit motives of a commercial paradigm, and allow for experimentation, artistic progress, and freedom from such compromises. In fact, low-budget and even amateur production imposes a different set of restrictions upon story properties. Brunel himself notes that when directing one film, 'the shot of the express train charging forward and into the scene with the principles was the most dramatic…but I couldn't do that sort of thing in my film'.[29] While avoiding the commercial paradigm might allow a certain compositional freedom from profit demands, this very lack of budget restricts the scope and possibilities of the (amateur) screenwriter. In this case, dramatic values (the train) are compromised by the cost restrictions. There are other narrative compromises to be made when valuing story above commercial imperatives. The commercial realities of film production must be addressed by screenwriters however they pitch their work. At

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[26] McKee, Story, p.63
[27] Brunel, Film Production, pp.32-33
[28] Ibid., p.5
[29] Adrian Brunel, "Ambition! A Pitfall in Production," Home Movies & Home Talkies May 1935: p.482

some level, the relationship between story values and cost (codified in commercial cinema through norms such as the star system) must be negotiated.

Part of this negotiation was in the star system's challenge to classical values espoused in screenwriting discourses as 'essential' to narrative composition. Classical narratives and classical Hollywood narratives are linked discursively to the Aristotelian principle of closure. The narratives are unified, with all the information required for a strongly closed, 'satisfying' conclusion presented through internal narrative resources. Narratives have a clear beginning, a strong ending, and are internally complete. However, Bordwell states that the, 'classical [Hollywood] film both trades upon the prior connotations of the star and masks these connotations, presenting the star as the character "as if for the first time"'.[30] Meaning is not contained within the closed narrative world, but contingent upon the existing traits and connotations of the star image. This sat uncomfortably with British screenwriting, which discursively drew cultural capital by situating its storytelling paradigm within the structures of Aristotelian classical narrative. In practice, the star persona limited narrative possibilities to those relating to existing star traits, while expectations of a star character dictated the screenwriter's story composition, rather than vice versa. The star system increased the fissure between the British story paradigm, based on the principles of Aristotelian classical narrative, and the storytelling paradigm of classical Hollywood. The contradictory story requirements create a contested hierarchy of values: what is more important – star values or story values? Under these circumstances how are notions of quality understood: what is a 'good' screenplay – one that fully exploits the star's characteristics, or one with unified, classical story values? While Bordwell *et al.* describe classical Hollywood's story paradigm as stable, unified and flexible enough to accommodate other practices, they do not account for the tension inherent in the screenwriting discourses relating to story composition and the star system. One value must be privileged above the other in the industrial conception of quality. While not mutually exclusive, the star system places pressure on closed and unified narrative strategies. Buchanan's observation about the perfect film containing no stars reflects his valuation of internal closure over stardom. While extra-textual

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[30] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.14

meaning and pleasure are integral to classical Hollywood's - and indeed other cinemas' – distribution and exhibition practices, at the level of narrative composition it challenges claims to internal closure. The tensions inherent in accommodating external meaning within narrative composition reveals the 'Aristotelian qualities' of classical Hollywood as a doxic construction which legitimises economic practices with associations of cultural capital, while in practice it often rejects these qualities. There is nothing inherently 'wrong' with such a narrative paradigm. All screenwriting norms and conventions are such constructions, valuing certain practices above others. The extra-textual meaning inherent in valuing the star system reveals the paradigm's economic basis, which unmasks classical Hollywood's claim to 'legitimate' forms. The British screenwriting manuals negotiated this changing system of values as the star system became more widespread. The relative values of 'story' and 'star' changed through the 1920s and 1930s as screenwriting became institutionalised.

Story was British cinema's prime value in the 1920s. However, screenwriters, including amateur writers attempting to 'break into' the industry, were encouraged to utilise the star system when composing their scripts. As early as 1926, advice in the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* suggested that, 'while the present system of film exploitation prevails, it is more practical to hitch your wagon to a star, so to speak, than to write your play without any definite personality in view for your leading part'.[31] For a time, the screenwriting field continued to place story at the apex of a hierarchy of values. Production companies outlined their demands for scenario submissions in *The Yearbook.* The changing nature of these demands charts the increasing importance of the star system. In 1926, studios specified story elements, but not star vehicles. Taking Balcon's studio concerns, Gainsborough and Gaumont, as examples, *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* in 1926 listed Gaumont as prepared,

> to consider novels, plays, or stories written especially for the screen. A brief outline, in narrative form, of the plot of the story should be sent in the first instance. A synopsis, some five or six typewritten pages in length, is generally sufficient for preliminary negotiations. No 'period' stories (i.e. stories involving costume other than modern) are at present required. Stories calling

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[31] Langford Reed, "The Art of the Photoplay," in ed. Agnes Herbert, The Writers' and Artists' Year Book 1926 (London: A&C Black, 1926), p.198

> for difficult foreign locations can be considered only if the plot is sufficiently outstanding to justify the expense that such locations necessitate. Stories which deal entirely with the recent war are not likely to be accepted. Stories laid in mythical kingdoms are not required. Acknowledgements are not ordinarily made. Payment in full is made on acceptance of a story.[32]

The potential expense of location and setting, along with story concerns were the primary considerations with only particularly strong stories overcoming these restrictions. In 1929, the introduction of the talkies led to Jackson stating, 'The market for these [scenarios] is somewhat unsettled and limited at the moment. Writers of really good, well-dialogued, short –stories could submit their *printed* efforts to the companies concerned. Prices are a matter of arrangement'.[33] The market appeared to be looking to attenuate risk; successful short stories could offer that. Pepper, writing in his 1925 manual, stated that due to the dearth of English 'film authors', producers, 'are inclined to favour the filming of novels and stories by famous authors. They are thus sure of some sort of success if they boom the author's name sufficiently'.[34] Such a strategy relied on the attraction of cultural capital associated with literary production and legitimate forms of writing as insurance against potential economic failure. Pepper noted that this was Stoll's primary production policy, while in America, the star system played the same role. This illustrates the privileging of story value in British cinema, although Pepper encouraged neophyte screenwriters to aim for an established market, and write for the stars. Production rose after 1932, and this was reflected in the advice given in *The Yearbook*. Editor Agnes Herbert noted that, 'The companies mentioned have their own studios and are likely to be in continuous production during the year. The activities of the smaller firms should be followed in the trade press'.[35] However, the scenario demands were not specified. The screenwriting section of *The Yearbook* changed in 1939, and a number of producing companies specified stars for whom they were looking for vehicles. Gainsborough Pictures were accepting scripts written for contracted players including Will Fyffe, Frank Formby, Nova Pilbeam, Lilli Palmer, Margaret

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[32] ed. Herbert, A., *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book 1926, A Directory for Writers, Artists and Photographers*, (London, A&C Black: 1926), p.199
[33] Arrar Jackson, "Writing for the Screen," in ed. Agnes Herbert, The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1929 (London: A&C Black, 1929), p.199
[34] Pepper, The Technique of the Photoplay, pp.19-20
[35] Herbert, ed., The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1932, p.247

Lockwood, Michael Redgrave, Will Hay, Graham Moffatt and Moore Marriott.[36] The entries in *The Yearbook* indicates the changing market as the studios' scenario requirements shifted towards star productions. The mid-1920s saw story and cost as the primary considerations; by 1939, this had changed to focus on writing for specific star players.

One of the screenwriting manual's primary functions is to interpret and communicate these changes in the screenplay market, especially for amateur writers hoping to submit a story successfully to a professional production company. The freelance or amateur screenwriter, composing original works from outside of the industry (as opposed to studio-employed staff writers, or free-lancing professionals), has to consider two instances of exchange. The screenwriter must sell the screenplay to the producer, who must then sell the finished film to the public. The first instance of exchange is dependant on the potential of the second instance, as understood by the producer. The potential quality of the screenplay is judged in reference to the qualities of that which has been successful in the past. The screenplay reader approaches each new proposal with a sense of curiosity about the work on its own terms, while attempting to find elements that fit pre-existing criteria: including the specific brief, current market requirements, their own perception of screenwriting craft and principles, and the more indefinable sense of their own 'taste'.[37] If a screenplay can successfully meet these criteria, it may be judged as 'good' or at least, less risky. Thus, while the producer utilises the star system to attenuate the risks of selling to the public, the screenwriter can attenuate their own risks in the first exchange by creating a screenplay which in turn minimises the producer's risk. Such an attitude was prevalent in the American screenwriting manuals from the early 1920s onwards. Emerson and Loos, writing in 1920, noted that, 'Many a Milton of the scenario game will remain unwarbled because he has neglected to place in his story the correct proportion of "star sympathy"…We want you to write great stories. But we want you to sell them'.[38] Notice how their advice contrasts writers who adopt an unsuccessful literary approach (Milton), with those who sell their screenplay by including star sympathy. Wright notes that, 'you are

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[36] Herbert, ed., The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1939, pp.214-215
[37] MacDonald, "Finding the Needle," p.28
[38] Emerson and Loos, How to Write Photoplays, pp.24-26

more certain to land a story by writing it with a star in your mind'.[39] Marion`s manual, which was published in the USA and the UK, states that the aim of her manual is to, 'enable would-be writers of saleable stories to direct their energies towards giving the motion-picture studios what they want'.[40] She instructs would-be writers to make use of the star system. While not as prevalent in the British discourses, several British manuals explicitly link a narrative composed for a star with financial success. MacPherson, writing in *The Picturegoer* in 1920, advocates a system of self-selection, advising writers to, 'send your story only to those companies which have stars for whom your story might be suitable'.[41] Fawcett expands on the commercial imperatives of 1930s commissioning: studios do not buy a story because it is unique or 'art', but because it falls into a well-known category, a star director wants to make it, or it fits the personality of a star actor.[42] The screenwriter is thus instructed to make their screenplay 'fit' into one or more of those categories. Lee, writing in 1937, notes,

> Writers, as a class, object to creating characters to fit stars. They prefer the situation the other way round. If you are a Shaw, or a Coward, you can write as you feel. The producers will worry about finding right players for the parts. An unknown writer will discover a certain laziness on the part of producers to go this far in his case. So unless he wants to fill his house with rejected film stories, he had better take my advice and write for the stars.[43]

This advice illustrates the two levels of exchange which the screenwriter must negotiate to create a successful screenplay, with the commercial imperatives Fawcett described. The screenplay needs a star writer – Shaw or Coward – or a part written for a star actor. The cultural capital associated with 'legitimate' forms of writing and story value were sufficient for the producer to take a risk on a known writer, but for the unknown screenwriter without such capital, writing a screenplay with star potential offered the producer a means of limiting the risk to their investment.

The exploitation of the *writer's* star status is symptomatic of a British attempt to accommodate both story and star values. Elinor Glyn returned to

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[39] William Lord Wright, Photoplay Writing (New York: Falk Publishing Co., 1922), p.34
[40] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, p.vii
[41] MacPherson, "The Market for Scenarios," p.40
[42] Fawcett, Writing for the Films, p.2
[43] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.65

England from Hollywood in 1929 to write, produce and direct two films, *Knowing Men* and *The Price of Things* for her own Elinor Glyn Productions Ltd. Both productions were designed to exploit her star image as the writer. The scenario of *Knowing Men* begins with a prelude of Glyn telling the story:

> (Elinor Glyn Waves quill – and slowly dissolve while voice goes on -) ---
>
> 'This is the young mother who knew it was wise to encourage her little son's pride and patriotism!' –
>
> (Shows picture of little boy)
>
> Dissolve back to Elinor Glyn - saying - - - -
>
> 'Now this girl understood that some men can be lassoed – by an appeal to their vanity!'[44]

The scenario ends with a fade to Glyn sitting in a chair, as she delivers an epilogue. The press book for *The Price of Things* has a full-page picture of Glyn, occupying the same position in the publicity material as photographs of star actors Douglas Fairbanks and Gloria Swanson in their respective star vehicles of that year. Glyn's name is prominent in the text, which highlights the romantic story and visual richness of English scenery.[45] Glyn's prelude and epilogue creates a dialectic narrative, acknowledging both the audience and Glyn's position as narrator. The presence of a narrator or storyteller ensures that the narrative reaches the audience as a form of 'telling', as opposed to classical Hollywood's method of invisible showing.[46] 'Telling' is a cultural means of exchange, grounded within the values of British literary production, or other impulses, such as the variety hall and vaudeville. Similarly, explicitly British values are exploited in the distribution material, such as the commodification of heritage in the setting. The foregrounding of distinctly British elements - Glyn as the writer and story as the prime value - is seemingly contradicted by this very process, which utilises the discourses and mechanisms of the star system (albeit the star *writer*) to promote the film. Glyn's productions were at best mediocre successes, but the process of production, distribution and exhibition illustrates

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[44] Elinor Glyn, "'Knowing Men' Related Correspondence", 1929-31, Box 20, Elinor Glyn Collection, The University of Reading, Reading
[45] "United Artists Pressbook", 1930-1, Special Collections, The British Film Institute, London
[46] Gledhill, Reframing British Cinema, p.157

the kind of negotiation which was occurring within the field in the contestation of star and story values.

Screenwriting manuals accommodated these elements more conventionally. Marion, writing in 1937, highlights the industrial privileging of star over story concerns, and the practical consequences for the screenwriter: 'Almost always the scenario is written as a starring vehicle for actor or actress under contract to the studio. The writer will therefore adapt the action and mood of the screenplay so that the star may display his or her particular abilities.[47] Story values were subordinated to the demands of star values. Buchanan complained about this system, arguing that there are 'comparatively few artists who are justified in dominating their pictures, and, although the "star" system usually places the "star" first and the story second, the principle is unsound…I wonder to what ends showmen will go for profit. There are too many films – too much relaxation – and too little intelligence'.[48] Although Buchanan praised a few stars as possessing that elusive 'star quality' which justified this value system, he, like many others in the field, felt that story should be the primary compositional value. The star system challenged the established use, meaning and relationships between story events. The selection and deployment of these events represented the field's conception of national cinema, the relationship with Hollywood, and issues of cinema's specificity as a medium. Screenwriting manuals attempted to establish a discourse of use which accommodated the economic imperative of utilising the star system while maintaining indigenous story values.

This was realised in the screenwriting manuals by recognising the financial potential of international stars, and combining these star personae with British story elements. The commercial potential of the star system was recognised by the British film industry, while its seeming inability to produce indigenous stars on the same scale as Hollywood was an important factor in Britain's lack of competitiveness at home and abroad.[49] Elinor Glyn, writing in 1930, hoped the industry would recognise the importance of utilising the star

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[47] Frances Marion, "Scenario Writing," in ed. Stephen Watts, Behind the Screen: How Films Are Made (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1938), p.36
[48] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, pp.5-6
[49] Higson, Waving the Flag, p.126

system, and demanded that producers photograph, light, and pay stars properly.[50] The use of the star system was bifurcated: to produce films to compete with Hollywood films at home, and to produce films to compete with Hollywood films abroad. Some studios, such as Gaumont-British, imported stars from Hollywood.[51] Others, such as Irving Asher at Warner Brothers-First National, looked to develop indigenous stars, but with Hollywood in mind.[52] Julius Hagen defended his policy of using American and Continental stars by placing entertainment above all other concerns. Fawcett commented on this practice in his manual: 'The British producer prefers usually to depend for glamour on Hollywood-made stars and even, low be it spoken, on Hollywood stars with diminishing splendour, which means that his story material must be exceptionally strong if he is to make a success'.[53]

Fawcett conceptualises the weakness of the indigenous star system as an imperative to strengthen story quality. Similarly Hagen noted that the, 'appeal of English films with backgrounds in our own history is as great in the country as it is on the Continent and in America'.[54] The use of specifically 'heritage' story elements – British landscape, properties, history – makes use of distinct story values while potentionally incorporating star properties. Buchanan argued for such a use, recognising a fundamental difference between, '*British films* and *films made in Britain*'.[55] He argued the failure of British production was due to the aping of American methods, including the star system, which led to the production of pictures which were shallow imitations of American films. He advocated the explicit use and exploitation of essentially British backgrounds, subjects and concerns to counter this. He encouraged the use of such indigenous story elements in British screenplays, stating that, 'whether one lives in Huddersfield, Heliogland or Hades, the location can be truly portrayed, framing whichever story one wishes to tell. The background shares the acting honours

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[50] Elinor Glyn, "Letter in Reply to 'The Cinema'", December 5 1930, Box 5, Elinor Glyn Collection, The University of Reading, Reading
[51] Higson, Waving the Flag, p.126
[52] Leonard Wallace, "Giving Unknowns a Chance," Film Weekly July 1 1937: pp.55-56
[53] Fawcett, Writing for the Films, p.4
[54] Julius Hagen, "The World's Our Oyster," Picturegoer Weekly January 2 1937: p.18
[55] Buchanan, Film Making, p.13

with the characters, each strengthening the other'.[56] Such a system of use sees the story and thematic elements integrated into a production which also utilised star elements. The advice to 'star' settings and background alongside conventional star acting was also found in Brunel's manuals. This advice partially addressed the amateur film market, which operated outside of the commercial imperative of professional filmmaking. However, promoting 'heritage' story elements within commercial star vehicles was an integral part of the screenplays promoted in the British manuals as examples of good practice. Buchanan cites Alexander Korda's productions as creating dignified, cultured and intelligent British productions. *The Private Life of Henry VIII* and *The Ghost Goes West* are singled-out. He notes that the international trading of stars, directors and stories means that, 'the completely British picture is fast vanishing, its place being taken by the picture made in Britain, possessing an appeal beyond the shores of the United Kingdom'.[57] While both films were made for release on the American market, they make judicious use of star roles (Charles Laughton won the Academy Award for Best Actor for his eponymous role in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*), as well as distinctly British story elements. The humour and romance of *The Ghost Goes West* is based upon untangling the 'special relationship' between the central characters, which is played out by juxtaposing 'old world' Scotland and 'new world' America. Street describes the, 'American appropriation of Scottish culture being satirized as jarring jazz music is heard; the castle is brightly illuminated and set amongst palm-trees, a fake moat and gondolas. These images invite a direct comparison with earlier scenes of the castle in Scotland, minimally decorated and located in a spectacular Scottish landscape'.[58] As discussed in Chapter 2, *The Ghost Goes West* was used as an example of script development in Seton Margrave's manual. Heritage story elements are specified at the script level – the suit of armour, the castle, a battle scene. The opening shot is of the Scottish landscape, with a bunch of thistles in the foreground. This is combined with ensuring screen time for Robert Donat in the dual-role as Murdoch and Donald, and Jean Parker as Peggy. Such a system of use, while not explicitly

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[56] Ibid., p.183
[57] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.12
[58] Sarah Street, "Special Relationships: Anglo-American screen romance and nationality." Trading Cultures Conference, Sheffield Hallam University, 2002

stated, stars both the background and the actors, in a technique articulated explicitly by Buchanan, and endorsed implicitly by others. Native story values remain intact while the film creates a fit with Donat's star persona.

The screenwriting manuals outline a technique of creating such a fit. Bordwell notes that, 'the star, like the fictional character, already had a set of salient traits which could be matched to the demands of the story'.[59] Arguably, narrative organisation actually occurred the other way round: Lee's manual gives a list of actors and their characteristics, 'around whom you can weave a story with definite star value'.[60] The manuals outlined a technique which matched story demands, specifically character traits, with the existing properties of the star image. This necessitated an initial focus on characterisation. Emerson and Loos noted certain narrative requirements when writing for a star, 'No famous screen actor will stand for a story in which he appears in only five percent of the scenes; nor will he accept a despicable character – a lounge lizard, for example – if his speciality is hero parts'.[61] Marion went further, noting how the script should consider, 'Not only the star's physical appearance, but his type of acting, his voice, his entire personality, should be considered so that his assets and abilities shall be fully employed…give more opportunity to the principals than to less important actors'.[62] This American advice focussed on fully utilising the assets of the star within the narrative organisation. This requires the allocation of both screen time and story incidents which maximise the star's potential exploitation onscreen. Fawcett notes that while story is seconded to star impulses, it remains in the star's interest to work with good story as, 'A succession of bad stories will damage the star's reputation, and every now and then a star 'walks out' on the studio, because he thinks the stories provided are not increasing his drawing power'.[63] The organisation and selection of story elements become a function of the star's traits, and the means of exploitation of those traits.

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[59] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.14
[60] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.56
[61] Emerson and Loos, How to Write Photoplays, pp.24-25
[62] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, pp.222-223
[63] Fawcett, Writing for the Films, pp.3-4

The appropriate matching of star and story is the key to successful star writing. The British manuals outlined a technique which would allow the writer to create such a match. Brunel initially focussed this matching on physical resemblance, and suggested, 'going into the *characterisation* rather fully when you are casting; characteristics which may be revealed and emphasised in the story, the action, the expressions and the dialogue *should* have a reasonable physical basis'.[64] Such advice promotes the classical Hollywood tenet of expressing internal characteristics through visual external or physical expression. Lee's manual provides a list of Hollywood and British actors and actresses, citing the salient story properties which might be utilised for each one. Notice how story properties and narrative organisation are determined by the exploitation of the star persona:

> Bobbie Howes is more sophisticated, and is always seen in polished surroundings. He is unquestionable one of the cleverest comedians on the screen. It is always safe to make Bobbie the fool of the family, with aristocratic upbringing and democratic leanings. If he is a rich young man chased by a flock of tough blondes and in attempting to escape meets (and loves) the daughter of, say, a policeman, success should be in sight. He will, of course, despite his natural timidity, help her father to round up an intelligent and unscrupulous gang of Mayfair crooks; so everything will turn out hunkydory. If you can make him an Earl it will help; then he can disguise himself as a bootblack, dance-band musician, or something. And there will be a song or two as he rolls along.[65]

This advice prescribes the story elements – characterisation, protagonist, antagonist, object of desire, obstacles, music, setting – as well as the organisation of these elements into a formulaic narrative. Acting on this advice, story elements are seconded to star demands. The way that screenwriters are advised to become familiar with these traits is universally similar: Jackson advises authors to 'go to the cinema and study the individuals themselves. If this is done, and the knowledge so gained of the star in point is coupled with the general technique of film-story writing, there should be no difficulty in getting at least one sale'.[66] He also encouraged screenwriters to read trade papers in order to keep abreast of contract movements. Morey, writing about the Palmer Playwriting Course, notes

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[64] Brunel, Film Production, p.58
[65] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.61
[66] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.130

that the underlying motive of such advice was not to create better screenwriters (as so few amateur ever 'break into' the industry), but rather, 'to create a "better" audience, more engaged, more informed, more invested in Hollywood – in short, an audience knowledgeable about, and thus sympathetic to the industry and the medium'.[67] The creation of such sympathy for the storytelling paradigm, mode and style of production is the underlying motive for writing a screenwriting manual or directing an educational course like The Palmer Corporation's. It operates on an industrial basis: the accumulated discourse of all the manuals is one of a number of discourses which stabilise and institutionalise industrial practices. The rush of American manuals published between 1928-1931 helped to create a stable discourse of practice which institutionalised the use of sound, and moulded the public's understanding of and sympathy towards what constituted quality sound practice. It also operates on an individual basis: an individual manual provides the author with an opportunity to espouse their particular understanding of practice, and advocate changes or innovation to its doxic principles. Such advice foregrounds the star as the centre of both audience and writer expectation; both go to the cinema to study the star. This aids the creation of the mythologised version of the star as the locus of unique traits.

Such symbolic capital is undermined by Lee's list of stars which outlines their personality traits, the roles they might fill, and names a British and American star whose persona meets these traits: 'Carol Lombard is the elegant woman of fashion who travels the path of ruthlessness, till brought up sharp by a masterly male personality. At Elstree they call on Binnie Barnes for Lombard roles'.[68] This problematises Sedgwick's assertion that stars hold unique traits which are difficult to replace. Lee's list offers a British counterpart to several Hollywood stars, noting, 'my object in presenting this list is that you may have some clear types in mind, as models: afterwards you can convert the parts to British supplies. There is no British Garbo, but there are actresses who could play parts created for others'.[69] This view denies Dyer's assertion of the 'magic' quality of stars, rendering them instead as a locus for a combination of traits to

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[67] Morey, Hollywood Outsiders, p.71
[68] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.63
[69] Ibid., p.62

be exploited within the organisation of story elements. Bordwell argues that, 'Economically, the star may be thought of as a monopoly on a personality'.[70]

Lee's list demonstrates the economic choice made by the screenwriter: if their preferred 'supplier' of matching traits is unable or unwilling to take on their story, they are able to switch to the next best option. As a market, there may be different values placed on the star's representation of those traits, but equally the market provides a series of actors who 'monopolise' those traits at different values. Indeed, Buchanan argued that matching such traits to the narrative demands was justified only in rare cases: 'the same "stars" float about the screen, their personalities invariably dominating the characters they are portraying. Screen players rarely sink their individualities into the parts they play, and, although this is a major fault, there are exceptional instances when screen artists, having established their abilities solely through the medium of film, are justified in appearing "as themselves"'.[71] These manuals build up a discourse denying the mythologised, symbolic status of the stars, revealing the system as artificially constructing significance around interchangeable actors who represent a cluster of traits. Garbo and a select few are excepted. Buchanan reveals this construct:

> The making of film stars is a highly specialized business, involving the brains and patience of producers, camera-men, publicity experts and dress-makers. Stars can be and are made from the most unpromising material, and the reason they are made is because they will be able to make poor pictures successful, and successful pictures sensations.[72]

The notion that 'a star is born' is revealed as a fabrication. What emerges from the manuals is a reductive technique which strips the star of their symbolic role and conceptualises them as story resource. This story resource is a dominant set of characteristics and traits around which the narrative must be organised. Taking the example of Bobbie Howes: he is not a 'star', but rather a set of parameters which govern the story elements – aristocratic setting, love story, musical numbers. These are story elements should must be accommodated. This story organisation is not specific to Howes, but rather the traits his star persona represent; the story is not created around Bobbie Howes 'film star', but around a

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[70] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.101
[71] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.5
[72] Buchanan, Films, p.222

set of story principles which, if written correctly, allow Bobbie Howes to exploit his bundle of salient star traits. If another actor possesses Bobbie Howes-like traits, then they would be able to fulfil this role. At the level of narrative composition, the star represents a series of boundaries within which story elements and narrative organisation must fall. The screenwriter performs an act of self-censorship in order to meet these boundaries, but there may still be room for creativity and expression. Dyer's notion of 'fit', or rather 'imperfect fit' illustrates the writer's ability to 'play' with the star image – to accommodate traits, or utilise the extra-diegetic expectations by playing against them. It is this elasticity which allows classical Hollywood to preserve both narrative and profit as its twin motives. In British cinema, the field's inclination to prioritise story found a way of accommodating these elements within the economic demands of writing for the stars.

Lee's list is representative of a hierarchy of values which situated British stars and star vehicles as inferior to their Hollywood counterparts. He writes that, 'if you write with Colman in view, and you fail to sell your story to Hollywood, you have Leslie Banks and Elstree to fall back on. Banks is the British Colman counterpart'.[73] Such a view institutionalises the superiority both of Hollywood stars, and the Hollywood industry as a preferable place to sell stories. This is typical of the British manual's uncertain valuation of indigenous stars. The recruitment of British stars exposed a number of oppositional tensions inherent in the field. British screenwriting had struggled to form a distinct and legitimate field and technique in relation to writing for the theatre. By recruiting stars from the theatre, this distinction was placed under pressure. Buchanan noted that,

> The majority of film stars are recruited from the stage (thereby creating yet another difficult link between the two mediums). This is because it is felt that their acting ability on the stage will enable them to make similarly good performances on the screen. I agree that their developed elocutionary powers stand them in good stead in dialogue films, and that their ease and assurance before the footlights will help them under the glare of studio lights, but I am of the opinion that their rightful place is on the stage and the stage only, for by bringing their technique to the studio they are compelling the film to countenance stage methods. Quite naturally, the dialogue film has encouraged this system, and has resulted in a general exodus from the stage, and, also, quite naturally, the Film has receded even farther into the background.[74]

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[73] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.57

[74] Buchanan, Films, p.223

His concern was not with the abilities of the actors themselves, as he concedes the transferability of their skills; rather he fears that such sharing of talent reduces cinema's unique medium specificity. His long-running concern that stars have no place in the 'pure film' is not a slight on the actors, but rather the storytelling norms which are created in order to accommodate stars. One of the values prevalent in British screenwriting discourses was that film should tell stories that could not be told in any other medium.[75] The institutionalisation of the star system challenged that value, particularly in Britain, as stars from the stage came to work in film, which exacerbated what screenwriters saw as the problem of stage adaptations. The Russian use of amateur actors was vaunted and valued, specifically because their use was purely cinematic, and lacked connotations of other media. Paradoxically, this valuation of purely cinematic actors spread to Hollywood stars whose star characteristics can only be revealed onscreen. While outlining the 'mediocrity of present-day films', Buchanan praises Garbo as possessing 'a genius which only the film can reveal,' while Marlene Dietrich is, 'a perfect creation of the film… possessing the most screenable of features, and a silky, slow manner which lends itself to the magic of camera lighting…She creates just that touch of unreality so necessary to complete the synthetic picture'.[76] He values those star traits which are essentially cinematic, and unable to be represented via other media. These characteristics are visual, as opposed to the acoustic excellence provided by stage actors, and link into Buchanan's conception of cinema as an essentially visual medium.

However, while importing personnel and techniques from the stage threatened British screenwriting's self-perception as a distinct medium, British stage actors were more used and inclined to performing as characters, rather than as stars. Lee notes that, 'In Britain we have a deplorable lack of leading ladies but a wonderful array of character actors. There is no part the writer can create for which a British casting office could not supply an actor. And a first-class actor at that'.[77] While theatre stars may have blurred boundaries, their range did offer to negate the narrative restrictions imposed on screenwriting composition

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[75] See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of compositional values.
[76] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.5
[77] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.26

by the necessity of accommodating salient star traits. The reality of a British star system brought into conflict two of the field's core values; what was more important: the narrative freedom deemed essential to film's medium specificity; or making a clean break from culturally 'legitimate' theatrical writing? Classical Hollywood was able to integrate the star as a key element of its hierarchy of values, utilising its conception of stardom to support its profit and narrative motives. In Britain, the star system challenged this hierarchy of values, and even when its demands could be accommodated for the obvious economic benefit, it compromised other values. By bringing into conflict seemingly irreconcilable demands, a less unified, more diverse and divergent response ensued.

A similar contradiction appeared in the debates over allocating a specific patriotic cultural capital to indigenous stars. Richards notes that the most popular British stars had a stage or variety background, such as Gracie Fields, George Formby, Jessie Matthews, Will Hay, Jack Hulbert and Jack Buchanan.[78] Higson outlines Michael Balcon's successful exploitation of Jessie Matthews' star persona both domestically and abroad, trading on a consistent narrative image and a spectacular body image.[79] Her breakthrough hit *Evergreen* (1934) was an adaptation of a Rogers and Hart musical *Ever Green* (1930), which was inspired by the life of variety star Marie Lloyd.[80] Of the ten films Matthews made for Gaumont British between 1933 and 1939, seven were musicals.[81] Many of her star traits – the songs, role-playing, mistaken identity – are strongly linked to her variety and musical theatre background. Similarly, British comic actors were very popular during this period, more so than their Hollywood counterparts.[82] Lee comments that, 'British film soil is rich in comedians', and names over a dozen comedians, and explicates the star traits of six others. Many of these comedians' films were never intended for anything other than domestic release, such as the work of Claude Herbert and Max Miller.[83] Their film stories, derived from the traits associated with their stage acts, were uniquely British, in some cases, specifically regional. While not 'purely cinematic' in the way that

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[78] Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace, p.172
[79] Higson, Waving the Flag, p.128
[80] Jenny Hammerton, "Evergreen", (Screenonline, The British Film Institute, 2007) July 28 2007
[81] Higson, Waving the Flag, p.130
[82] Sedgwick, Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain, p.194
[83] Wallace, "Giving Unknowns a Chance," p.56

Buchanan and others would have conceptualised their actors, the story elements these performers brought via their star personae were distinctly British, and differentiated their products from those of classical Hollywood. Yet again, the hierarchy of values extant in British screenwriting during the 1920s, and the field's aspirations were challenged by the institutionalisation of the star system as an industrial form. Two key values - British cinema as distinct from theatrical heritage, and British cinema as nationally distinct from Hollywood - were placed in direct opposition by the star system. This opposition was articulated by the manuals, to form anything but the stabilising discourses which classical Hollywood enjoyed when accommodating the star system.

By the end of the 1930s, the star system was institutionalised in British cinema, and the star an expected and staple component of any professional script. How did British cinema deal with this change? A look at practice would suggest an admirable transition: a British, largely second-tier phalanx of stars was established and became an essential part in the revival of domestic production in the mid-1930s. A select few – Laughton, Donat, Matthews – made the transition to international stardom in British and Hollywood productions. The system of star trading appears to have provided the necessary boost in glamour for British productions, while British screenwriters wrote scripts for stars at all levels. However, an examination of the discourses emerging from the screenwriting manuals presents a less positive response. The economic advantages of the star system were widely acknowledged in British cinema, and similarly acknowledged by the screenwriting field. However, the use of the star system represented the profit motive laid bare; it restricted story freedom, but was the price of success. Some manual authors, especially Buchanan and Brunel, with their avant-garde past, yearned for freedom from this system, eyed the Russian use of non-professional actors with envy, and directed their manuals towards the amateur film societies, producing and innovating freely. There was also a sense that the star system represented professionalism; that selling the screenplay was an essential part of being a screenwriter. Neophyte writers were encouraged to write with stars in mind, if they wanted to achieve a sale. Such an impulse came partly from the field's desire for legitimation as a writing form distinct from the

tyranny of the page and stage. Yet, these were precisely the media from which many British stars emerged. For the screenwriting field, this was both progressive and retrograde, and as a result, the manuals offered confused, often conflicting advice. The tension between story and star values appeared to be resolved as a theory of practice emerged which sought to utilise stars (for their economic value), and to 'star' backgrounds, locations and settings. This utilisation of 'heritage' elements combined discourses of national and cinematic specificity with star demands. They located the fruits of such practice in the successes of Korda's major productions, which were hits domestically and abroad. While much, perhaps most, screenwriting practice did not emulate the successful combination of story and star elements (alongside the lavish production budgets), the field contained a standard to which to aspire. Similarly, a prevalent discourse within British screenwriting manuals was the establishment of a specifically British style and mode of production. The emergence of British stars promised such a style, but the utilisation of the star system appeared to be aping Hollywood's mode of production. Such tensions were common within the manuals.

The British manuals' diverse grappling with these tensions reveals how the doxic construction of the star system supports the classical Hollywood economic paradigm. The construction of classical Hollywood's narrative, based on strong characterisation, following the journey of a single protagonist and motivational causality support the exploitation of the star's image as a means of attenuating financial risk. The narrative demands of the star system – placing a star on screen, providing story resources to demonstrate their particular traits – reveal these classical narrative tenets to be neither natural nor inevitable, but a function of commercial demands. The mythologised image of the star as holding a 'monopoly' on certain traits is brought into question as the manuals conceptualise stars as a series of narrative restrictions and demands, to which the organisation of narrative must be shaped. The tensions in the theory of practice outlined by the manuals is illustrated in the following case study, which examines the cinematic career of comedian Max Miller. Writing for Miller demanded the negotiation of his star persona with story demands, while also

bringing into question notions of national specificity, the relationship with the quota, 'Englishness' and the relationship with the stage.

Chapter 6: Scripting the 'Cheeky Chappie': Writing for Max Miller at Warner Brothers- First National

> Playing a full-length part is different from taking small roles. In this picture I'm myself to a certain extent, but, at the same time, it's something of a character part.[1]
>
> Max Miller (1935)

Max Miller was a popular variety hall comedian whose loud-mouthed, fast-talking 'Cheeky Chappie' persona transferred successfully from stage to screen in the 1930s. Unlike the socially inept performers represented by his contemporaries Leslie Fuller or George Formby, or the infantile Will Hay, Miller's persona was based on an endless stream of self-confidence and *risqué* comebacks.[2] He appeared in a number of supporting roles for Gaumont British in the early 1930s, but it was with Warner Brothers-First National that he made his screen name, appearing in a series of eight low-budget vehicles between 1935 and 1939. Frank Launder scripted or co-scripted Miller's first three pictures for Warner Brothers. The others were written by less distinguished screenwriters, mostly on the staff at Teddington, including John Dighton, Jack Henley, Reginald Purdell, John Meehan Jr., J.O.C. Orton and Austin Melford. The screenplays were usually worked on by several writers, under the direction of script editor Brock Williams, as was normal practice within the studio.

Miller's breakthrough came with his second film *Educated Evans*. Based on Edgar Wallace's eponymous racing tipster, Miller found critical and popular success in the 1936 production, directed by American William Beaudine, scripted by Frank Launder with gags written by Robert Edmunds. In Miller's portrayal of Evans, with his quick wit and garish costumes, the production team found a formula for success. They repeated it by providing a veneer of motivated story development, which provided Miller with the narrative time and space to perform his thinly veiled stage routine. His biographer, John East, felt that Miller 'floundered' in these efforts, due to being placed in 'bad' films.[3] His concerns may be attributed to the way these films broke the hierarchy of compositional values extant in both classical Hollywood and British cinema in order to

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[1] John K. Newnham, "Max Miller Faces Stardom," Film Weekly July 26 1935: p.10
[2] Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries, p.142
[3] John M. East, Max Miller - The Cheeky Chappie (London: W.H. Allen, 1977), p.127

privilege the position of the star. The screenwriters working on the films attempted to balance story/causal narrative values with the demands of allocating screen time and space to the exploitation of Miller's act. However, the ratio of story to star value became increasingly equalised during the later films, as various screenwriters attempted to incorporate the spatial and temporal demands into the narrative diegesis of the story world.

The exploitation of Miller's star persona presented challenges for the screenwriters assigned to each production. The narrative composition had to account for a number of competing story paradigms: Miller's act and existing appeal emanated from the variety stage; the setting within the Warner Brothers studio demanded adherence to an industrial conception of classical Hollywood narrative; the film was written, produced and intended for the domestic market, which brought implicit connotations of 'Englishness'. The articulation of Miller's onscreen persona exemplifies the discursive – at times circular and even paradoxical - concerns over the star system expressed in the British screenwriting manuals. Central to these concerns was the use in the star system of non-cinematic elements which might 'dilute' the medium's specificity. Miller's unique star trait was his variety stage act. The screenwriters incorporated this non-narrative element into the motivated narrative of the film. Indeed, Miller's non-cinematic career is acknowledged within his films and in several of their titles, taken from his catch-phrases (*Don't Get Me Wrong, Take it From Me, Get Off My Foot* etc.).[4] While several British manuals discouraged the use of the star system as it aped Hollywood's methods, Miller was a distinctly English star (and southern English at that), while his act utilised British concerns about nationality, gender and class. The manuals also expressed concern that the star system might lead to story elements being discarded in favour of star properties.

The way the various screenwriters at Teddington negotiated these elements in practice is the central concern of this case study. This practice was further complicated by the narrative demands institutionalised within the Warner Brothers' studio, and the speed and cost requirements of writing quota pictures. This chapter will first explore how Miller's cinematic star image was established, how he incorporated 'American' influences into his act, why it was suited to

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[4] Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries, p.146

transfer to the screen, and how he and his exploiters tempered his 'blue' stage persona. Second, it will examine how the screenwriters working in the Teddington studio used these traits in their narrative composition to establish a stable star image, and create a sense of 'fit' between Miller's stage and cinematic images. It will consider how they negotiated the competing narrative and story demands that such composition required throughout Miller's association with Warner Brothers. It approaches the screenwriting demands of writing for Miller in individual films, as well as explicating the patterns of practice which were created during his career at Teddington.

The institutionalised approach to the use and reuse of story material at Warner Brothers outlined in chapter 4 provides an insight into the creation of Miller's stable cinematic image throughout the latter part of the 1930s. These concerns will be illustrated with close reference to the script of Miller's final film of the decade, *Hoots Mon!* [1939, dir. Roy William Neill, sc. John Dighton and Jack Henley]. The script most actively plays with the boundaries between Miller's stage and screen personae, casting Miller as Henry Hawkins – 'England's Funniest Comedian' – a thin recasting of Miller as himself. The narrative makes judicious use of classical Hollywood organisation as well as incorporating the required variety elements, all the while revelling in distinctly British locations, themes and humour. The difficulty in assessing Miller's career at Warner Brothers and the practices of those who wrote for him is that nearly every film is lost. *Hoots Mon!* and *Don't Get Me Wrong* are available, while contemporary trade press interviews provide an insight into the industrial reception of the rest. This chapter is based primarily on existing story and script material, which illuminates practices and processes of the screenwriters at Teddington who conceived and wrote the screenplays. Miller's opening quotation illustrates the struggle the star faces which was a primary concern in British screenwriting discourses: how do actors reconcile playing themselves against playing the character? The screenwriter faces the same demands, while conditions of production, in concert with his habitus, results in practice.

Miller's first screen appearances were in bit-parts and secondary roles during his five film appearances for Gaumont-British, where he essentially played himself, performing a whitewashed version of his variety hall act in short

sketches contained within the film's narrative. Such ectopic, non-narrative appearances were an acceptable part of the entertainment when Miller played secondary roles. *Kinematograph Weekly* noted of Miller's contribution to *Princess Charming* (1934) that, 'he ignored the story and put over his own act'.[5] However, Miller's move to starring roles at Warner Brothers necessitated a more nuanced integration of star and story elements. Miller's screen success can be attributed more to his rapid style of delivery than to the content of his gags (they were all from his 'white' rather than his 'blue' book). This style was overtly indebted to the American technique of screen comics: Sutton refers to a 'vital infusion of American blood into British comedy'.[6] Miller himself identified his technique as being,

> Like the Americans, see. Just work out your gags natural and easy. And reckon on the audiences getting the point. The trouble with English comics is that they think they've got to repeat a gag ten times before the audience catches on, see. The Americans know that if a gag doesn't catch first time, it's a lousy gag. So they've got another one ready. I know I'm an English comedian, but I use the American style.[7]

This style was understood and exploited at Warner Brothers through the collaborations with experienced American director William Beaudine. [8] Miller's willingness to discard comic material which was inadequate resonated with the Warner Brothers' institutional perception of story material as disposable. Because story material was never legitimised as 'sacred' within the studio, it lacked a symbolic value which might prevent it being changed or discarded when required. This technique served Miller and Warner Brothers well during their relationship. Key to this was Miller's speed of delivery. Like the American comics, he would deliver each gag, 'natural like, and have another ready behind it'.[9] This stream of jokes utilised the immediacy and speed of the cinematic medium; if the audience did not laugh at a particular gag, another followed immediately. The trade reviews were very positive of *Educated Evans*, and identified this Americanised speed of delivery as key to its success.

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[5] Quoted in East, Max Miller - The Cheeky Chappie, pp.130-131
[6] Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries, p.144
[7] Harry Watt, "The Reason I'm Good," World Film News August 1937: p.3
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

Kinematograph Weekly commented that, 'Miller wisecracks brilliantly at a speed such as only American comics normally attain'.[10] *The Picturegoer* praises the 'snap and sparkle too often lamentably missing in our home-made comedies'.[11] It was this quality that the screenwriters at Teddington had to exploit.

A suitable scenario was found for Miller's first film. Scottish-born, Broadway playwright Edward A. Paulton submitted a scenario for a farcical film comedy to Warner Brothers' New York office in September 1933.[12] The script would appear to be one of the story properties that Asher brought back to Teddington in his American raids. Initially called *Money by Wire*, the story centres on the adventures of a cockney market seller who, believing he is responsible for a friend's death, escapes to the country to become a butler in a country house. Unbeknownst to him, he inherits a fortune, which the aristocratic but broke family discover. He falls for the maid, while the family try to foist their daughter upon him. A handwritten note on the story report suggests it as a 'Possible Chaplin', and the narrative suggests a potential comic vehicle. However, the New York story reader commented that, 'This farce strikes me as a very synthetic effort, a mechanical struggle to be funny. The humor [sic] is not there. At least, I couldn't find anything funny in it'.[13] The story's humour is neither anchored in the narrative progression, nor in the relationship between story elements. Rather, it provides narrative time and space for the comic protagonist (Miller, or in the original instinct, Chaplin) to perform their routine. While deemed inadequate for an American production, Asher gave the story to Frank Launder to work into a shooting script under production number 171. The shooting script accredits story and dialogue to Launder, although gag-man Robert Edwards was given a screen credit, due to his contribution of thinking up jokes, often from the studio floor.[14]

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[10] "Educated Evans," Film Weekly September 19 1936: p.32

[11] Allen Eyles and David Meeker, eds., Missing Believed Lost (London: BFI, 1992), p.70, quoted in Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries, p.144

[12] What was then called a 'scenario' would today be called a 'treatment'; a present-tense recounting of the story in a short-story form. In a move sure to fuel the apocryphal stories of script readers, Paulton wrote the cover page of his submission in crayon.

[13] John K. Butler, "Story Report - 'Money by Wire'", October 21 1933, Misc. 2076, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles

[14] Frank Launder, "Get Off My Foot", 1935, 2076, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Brown, Launder and Gilliat, p.66

Launder's script was divided into seven sequences specified in the shooting script, and indicated onscreen by the use of transitional fades into and out of each sequence. These included a sequence at Smithfield Market, and a sequence in a ballroom. While Miller acknowledged that he was playing both himself and a character in this film, the story organisation of *Money By Wire/Get Off My Foot* foregrounds star value to the detriment of story concerns. While the classical Hollywood paradigm motivates comedy through the centrality of narrative, Launder's narrative organisation breaks these organisational tenets by situating the comic outside the diegesis. *Kinematograph Weekly* states that the story of *Get Off My Foot*, 'never for a moment pretends to be convincing, nor to do anything other than exploit the personality and technique of the leading comedian'.[15] The *Monthly Film Bulletin* acknowledged Miller's knock-about humour to the detriment of story values, noting that, 'not very much is made of his fear of arrest'.[16] Storylines are raised but never developed or resolved. While the climax brings a romantic resolution, the strong foregrounding of star elements leaves the narrative without a strong sense of internal closure. This deviates from the classical demands of story common to both British and Hollywood practice. Rather, Miller's act is a narrative interruption, which combined with the episodic structure overwhelms any sense of continuity or causality. Sutton notes that such 'interruptions' were common in British film comedies of the time.[17] Miller seemed particularly aware of the tension between his star persona and the demands of classical storytelling, represented in his quotation on the dilemma of playing 'himself' and playing a 'character'.

Miller and the screenwriters working at Teddington addressed this tension in the next production, incorporating Miller's act and star persona into the narrative development of the screenplays, so that Miller's variety turns were motivated, and in turn motivated an unfolding chain of causal events. Non-narrative elements were incorporated into the closed narrative framework as much as possible, while elements and tropes of classical Hollywood storytelling, such as romance plots and character development were utilised. The development of such a technique was successfully used in the next film, Miller's

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[15] "Get Off My Foot," Kinematograph Weekly October 31 1935: p.29
[16] "Get Off My Foot," Monthly Film Bulletin November 1 1935: p.170
[17] Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries, p.145

break-through hit *Educated Evans*. Warner Brothers acquired the exclusive story rights to Edgar Wallace's character 'Educated Evans' specifically for Miller at a cost of £750 for a seven-year option.[18] The production cost £25,000, but grossed over £100,000 in its UK and Commonwealth release.[19] The success of *Educated Evans* cemented Miller's status as a bankable star. *Kinematograph Weekly* praised the way Miller, 'adapts his experienced technique brilliantly for the needs of the screen'.[20] Seton Margrave, reviewing the film, praised Beaudine's direction for keeping, 'pace with the music hall speed' of Miller's patter.[21] While Miller's routines remained the unique trait which the film exploited, narrative values were also maintained in this production. *Kinematograph Weekly* highlighted the episodic narrative structure of *Educated Evans*, while praising the dramatic twists.[22] Launder's second Miller script addressed the inadequacies of the first, and a technique of use began to emerge which accommodated the spatial and temporal demands of exploiting Miller's routine within the narrative demands of classical composition.

A stable narrative organisation was established to integrate Miller's persona and stage act into a classically motivated story world. *Kinematograph Weekly's* review of *Transatlantic Trouble* highlighted screenwriters John Meehan Jr. and J.O.C. Orton's success in motivating comic moments through the narrative progression: '[*Transatlantic Trouble*] differs from the average British comedy, mainly in the fact that the characters and situations are sufficiently realistic to give point to the humour, while many of the gags have a precision of timing in the best Hollywood tradition. The laughs are never forced, but arise naturally out of the plot development'.[23] This combination of Miller's Americanised delivery with a story organisation which was moulded to support his variety persona through the use of classical Hollywood narrative techniques established a successful formula within the studio. Typical of the institutionalised attitude of reusing story material which was prevalent within

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[18] "Educated Evans - Story Rights", December 7 1935, 12701, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles
[19] Brown, Launder and Gilliat, p.73
[20] "Educated Evans," Kinematograph Weekly September 3 1936: p.29
[21] Seton Margrave, "Max Miller", September 15 1936, Personality Clippings, The British Film Institute, London
[22] "Educated Evans," p.29
[23] "Transatlantic Trouble," Kinematograph Weekly September 23 1937: p.25

Warner Brothers, a formula emerged which integrated star and story elements within a narrative structure flexible enough to accommodate narrative changes, while allowing the time and space needed for Miller to perform his star patter. Compare the opening sections of *Thank Evans* (1938), *Everything Happens to Me* (1938) and *Hoots Mon!* (1939). The focus in the opening shots on signs quickly establishes the story world, and on *Thank Evans* and *Hoots Mon!*, the sign gives expositionary information about Miller's character. Miller always enters in the subsequent shot. The use of this expositionary material negotiates the tension between star and story concerns: it establishes the world and the character that Miller's star persona inhabits for the duration of the film.

THANK EVANS (1938)

FADE IN:

1. EXT. BAYHAM MEWS. NIGHT. CLOSE SHOT on electric sign.

This is a neon sign erected on the exterior of Evan's flat in Bayham Mews. As the scene opens CAMERA is so close on the sign that we are only able to read the middle two line which are as follows:-

EDUCATED EVANS
The Turf Advisor De Luxe

CAMERA DRAWS BACK to take in the complete sign, and reveals already illuminated the top two lines, so that we now read:

GET ALL THE WINNERS
from
EDUCATED EVANS
The Turf Advisor De Luxe

In the space at the bottom of the sign some further words spell themselves in lights, reading:

You want the Best Horses – I Give Them![24]

EVERYTHING HAPPENS TO ME (1938)

CLOSER SHOT. PROCESSION.

As it comes swinging past CAMERA we are now close enough to read the wording on the banners, the first of which announces in large letters:

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[24] John Dighton, Austin Melford and John Meehan Jr., "Thank Evans", 1938, 2300, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles, p.1

SUNHAVEN BYE-ELECTION
ARTHUR GUSTY
for
PARLIAMENT

Following this comes two more banners.

1. VOTE FOR GUSTY

2. GUSTY FOR YOUR CHAMPION.[25]

HOOTS, MON! (1939)

FADE IN.

1. MAIN TITLES

The play-in music over these should be "MARY FROM THE DAIRY" played on the bagpipes.

LAP DISSOLVE TO:

2. EXT. TOTTENHAM EMPIRE MUSIC HALL. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT. DAY.

In electric lights over the entrance of the theatre, we read the words:

TOTTENHAM EMPIRE MUSIC HALL.

CAMERA PANS DOWN on to the front wall of the theatre, concentrating on a large poster advertising the week's variety programme.

3. CLOSE SHOT on POSTER

At the top of the bill in enormous letters we read:

"HARRY HAWKINS"
England's funniest Comedian.

Below this name are those of numerous other acts. The bottom of the poster is not in scene. CAMERA PANS AWAY from the poster to the kerbside, where we see a large flashy-looking car just pulling up.

On the side of the car in letters almost as striking as those on the poster, we read again:

"HARRY HAWKINS"
England's funniest Comedian.[26]

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[25] John Dighton and Austin Melford, "Everything Happens to Me", May 17 1938, 1880A, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles, p.1
[26] John Dighton and Jack Henley, "Hoots Mon!" 1939, H-90, Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California, Los Angeles, p.1

John Dighton scripted all three films, with Austin Melford for *Everything*; with Melford and Meehan in *Thank Evans*; and with Jack Henley for *Hoots Mon!*. Dighton and his collaborators created screenplays that utilised visual storytelling to quickly and efficiently establish the time, place and theme in which the narrative would unfold. Miller played a series of characters – a vacuum salesman, a racing tipster, England's funniest comedian – while at the same time he played himself. The Teddington scriptwriters reused successful elements of story organisation across the screenplays of Miller's career with Warner Brothers. In *Thank Evans* and *Everything Happens To Me*, Miller's character is locked-up just before the final climax. This story deployment combines the conventions of classical Hollywood with Miller's star persona. The character has a goal (he is motivated to reach the new location where the denouement will eventually take place), an obstacle to that goal (he is locked up), and the means of overcoming that obstacle based on an understanding of character/star persona (Miller will talk his way out). By delaying the final scene, the screenwriters create dramatic tension. The use and re-use of such story organisation has sound dramatic and compositional value, while motivating the temporal and spatial systems for the performance of the star persona. Similarly, the screenwriters demonstrated an understanding of Miller's star traits, and how they might successfully be transferred to the screen.

The humour in Miller's variety act was based on his rapport with an audience, firing his rapid one-liners to expose gaps in audience expectation. In order to facilitate the exploitation of this trait, the screenwriters organised the story resources to place Miller's characters in front of an audience in film after film. Temporal and spatial resources were set aside for the performance of his routine in front of an audience, while attempting to maintain motivated narrative causality. In *Money By Wire* there is a ballroom scene; in *Thank Evans* he performs in front of a court. The entire narrative organisation of *Everything Happens To Me* is based around placing Miller's character in front of an audience. The story organisation is thinly motivated: when Cromwell (Miller) discovers the election candidate he supports is a fraudster, he deserts him to aid the side of an orphanage. Because the story is about an election, speeches in front of expectant crowds are contained within the verisimilitude. However, there is

little narrative progression: Miller's character moves from one audience to another, performing his comic and musical act, with little causal motivation or progression. The concept of organising story resources to place Miller in front of an onscreen audience was taken to its logical conclusion in *Hoots Mon!*, where Miller plays Harry Hawkins, a comedian. The causal narrative is driven by Harry's desire to prove that his act is superior to Jenny McTavish (played by Florence Desmond). Both Miller and Desmond's extra-diegetic stage acts are incorporated into the narrative of the film.

The use of signs in the opening scenes, along with the repeated narrative organisation, illustrates how the Warner Brothers scriptwriters established successful storytelling conventions which aided audience comprehension and helped them to negotiate the 'fit' between Miller's star persona and the character onscreen. They provided a formula for exploiting Miller's star persona within the boundaries of classical Hollywood storytelling practices. Having such a template allowed the screenwriters to produce the script quickly in order to meet the cost and speed demands necessitated by the quota. The primacy of narrative/story as the paradigm's main compositional value was maintained; or at the very least, it was not subordinated to a narrative organisation which demanded temporal and spatial dominance for the exploitation of Miller's star traits. The Warner Brothers screenwriters negotiated the demands of these competing systems by accommodating temporal and spatial interruptions in narrative as a part of the causally motivated chain of events. Particularly successful examples of this negotiation were repeated across a number of films, as an informal formula of narrative organisation emerged.

The trade papers lauded this technique as a success. *Kinematograph Weekly* praised the balance between story and star demands in *Transatlantic Trouble*. Miller, 'adapted his personality and methods particularly well to the part, and the film gains strength from the fact that while none of the "cheeky chappie" charm and wit has been lost he is still always in character'.[27] The success of this technique was accredited to the scenarists and director, who gave, 'the star a chance to do his stuff without impairing the characterisation and story

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[27] "Transatlantic Trouble," p.25

values or suggesting a music hall comedian putting over his act'.[28] Similarly, the story organisation of *Hoots Mon!* was praised as being, 'contrived as to introduce logically the individual acts of popular stars,' while, 'the entertainment`s ingenuity is revealed in the way in which the stars are permitted to bring their box-office music-hall turns to the screen without interference to character drawing as dictated by the script. In fact, we can go further: the one amplifies the other'.[29]

The reviews illustrate the successful integration of Miller's routine into the narrative organisation of the story. While in his early appearances for Gaumont-British, Miller essentially came on and performed his act in a loosely motivated story event, the screenwriters at Teddington were able to incorporate his act into the structures of classical Hollywood narrative. Consider Miller's first appearance in *Everything Happens to Me*, in which he plays Charlie Cromwell, vacuum salesman. This is the second scene in the film, and introduces Cromwell/Miller for the first time:

> CAMERA TRACKS with Charlie. As he moves briskly along the pavement, he passes a lamp-post to which a fairly full litter basket is attached. Just by this is Charlie's car – a battered open tourer of early vintage. A strip across the windscreen reads: "Champion Vacuum Cleaner – Sole Representative – C. Cromwell.: With the ease born of practice Charlie unhooks the litter basket and turning to the next house empties the litter through the letter box. Having done so, he rings the bell, then turns and calmly replaces the litter basket.[30]

This scene accommodates star requirements within classical Hollywood narrative structures. The sign acts as exposition, quickly establishing Miller's character and his profession. The character is given a clearly-defined goal (to sell the vacuum) and an obstacle to achieving that goal (the door is closed). In order to overcome that obstacle, the character takes action (puts litter through the post box, and rings the bell). This action defines the character; Cromwell 'performs' the 'Cheeky Chappie'. A causal chain of events is set in motion. When the door

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[28] Ibid.
[29] "Hoots Mon!," Kinematograph Weekly November 16 1938: p.22
[30] Dighton and Melford, "Everything Happens to Me", p.4

is answered, Miller uses his stage 'patter' to try to sell the vacuum cleaner (with predictably disastrous results):

> CHARLIE (shouting)
> Look at that lovely quick start –
> and on a cold day, too – and when
> she warms up you can hear a pin
> drop – well a rolling pin, anyway.[31]

The comedy is anchored in the narrative. This gag, while not out of place on the variety stage, is motivated from the character's desire to achieve his goal and sell the vacuum cleaner. He does this through the demonstration, which creates the next obstacle as noise and power of the vacuum begins to suck up the lino, which in turn Cromwell attempts to overcome through his quick-fire routine. Time and space have been causally motivated for the performance of this star trait, and are part of the chain of cause and effect which is the primary storytelling system of classical Hollywood production.

Within the integration of Miller's variety routine into the structures of the classical Hollywood storytelling paradigm, the British screenwriters were also able to place a number of distinctly British story themes. *The Picturegoer* called *Educated Evans*, 'typically English in character'.[32] Indeed, Miller's 'Cheeky Chappie' persona was a particular type of distinctly British seaside comedian. Discussing the future of British film comedy, Miller stated, 'Of course there's a future for British comedies. But they must move fast. And none of this la-di-da stuff…Real high society it was. But I brought it down to earth. Real life stuff you want, of real people. Like you and me, see'.[33] He outlines an Americanised technique of delivery running alongside a thematic focus. Theme was one of the major compositional values of British screenwriting, and Miller's intention to bring high society 'down to earth' through the comic exploration of class issues was a recurring comic trope throughout his productions at Teddington. His 'Cheeky Chappie' persona is obviously and deliberately working-class in origins. Miller stated that he tried his jokes out on the boys on the tram to find out if they were good, and continued to play variety hall shows, even when required on set

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[31] Ibid., p.11
[32] Quoted in Eyles and Meeker, eds., Missing Believed Lost, p.70
[33] Watt, "The Reason I'm Good," p.3

the next day.[34] While his star persona would negate a story organisation based around the 'drawing room romance' disparaged by Jack Warner, issues of class and aristocratic types and settings familiar from contemporary screen stories did appear in Miller's films. He played Herbert, who escapes to a country house as a butler in *Get Off My Foot*. According to the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, this setting provided Miller with an opportunity for, 'a few digs at the huntin' and ridin' crowd'.[35] In this scene the aristocratic Rawlingcourts are the butt of Miller's knock-about humour:

SCENE 92
M.C.S. OF MRS. RAWLINGCOURT
SEATED AT A DESK. SHE HAS
HER GLASSES ON THE TIP OF
HER NOSE. BY HER SIDE IS
MAJOR RAWLINGCOURT CAMERA
PULLS BACK AND TAKES IN HERBET

MRS. RAWLINGCOURT
What families have you been with?

MAJOR RAWLINGCOURT
Yes- what families?

SCENE 93.
C.S. HERBERT
HE STROKES HIS CHIN

HERBERT
Well, let me see…I was four years with the Cokers…

SCENE 94
M.S. OF GROUP

MAJOR RAWLINGCOURT
Not the Cotswold Cokers?

HERBERT
No – the 'Igh Street Cokers, but their beds was damp so I moved to Mrs. Jezzard's..

MAJOR RAWLINGCOURT
My wife means were you with any <u>good</u> families.

HERBERT

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[34] Ibid. p.3 East, <u>Max Miller - The Cheeky Chappie</u>, p.134
[35] "Get Off My Foot," p.170

Oh! Well, I was with Mr. and Mrs. West – they were good..

MAJOR RAWLINGCOURT
Were they?

HERBERT
Oh, very good – strict Presbyterians.

MRS RAWLINGCOURT
(irritably)
I mean <u>good class.</u>

HERBERT
Oh, I see what you're getting at. The nobs! Let me think…Well, I was ten years at Smithfield – with Lord Smithfield.

MAJOR RAWLINGCOURT
Really?

MRS. RAWLINGCOURT
Lord Smithfield?

HERBERT
You know – Lord Smithfield?

MAJOR RAWLINGCOURT
Er – yes - naturally… naturally…[36]

Miller's characteristic quick-witted patter exposes the vacuous snobbery of the 'la-di-da' types. The humour is based in the gap of expectation created by class: for Herbert 'good families' means dour Presbyterian self-restraint (the antithesis of Miller's garishly dressed persona); for the social climbing Rawlingcourts, it means ancient breeding and a respectable name (even when that good name is derived from a meat market). Class relations proved a fertile ground for Miller's repartee, playing a substantial role in the setting, characterisation and humour of *Get Off My Foot, Take It From Me* and *The Good Old Days*. These films not only exploit Miller's routines, but also play with the types of characters and cinematic conventions prevalent within contemporary British films.

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[36] Frank Launder, "Money By Wire", 1935, 2076, <u>Warner Brothers' Collection, The University of Southern California</u>, Los Angeles

While the screenwriters constructed a narrative template which provided a successful compromise between story and star demands, in practice Miller often improvised his lines on set. This attitude was ingrained in Miller from his first film appearance, a three-minute sketch in *The Good Companions*. Director Victor Saville told Miller that his character was trying to sell a piano to John Gielgud, and that he could do, 'anything you like'. Miller 'just stood there and rattled it off,' which 'proved that I didn't have to stick to the exact words of the script to be able to put over a performance'.[37] *The Picturegoer* warned that Miller's practice of deviating from the script may lead to his monologues becoming, 'peppered with modern slang'.[38] However, 'putting over a performance' was the star trait which Warner Brothers were attempting to exploit in the Miller films. While such practices would challenge conventional notions of the sanctity of the script, the institutionalised attitude towards story material within the studio was that it operated as another component of production. The compositional aim of these vehicles was to allocate time and space for Miller to put over a performance. The challenge faced by the screenwriters working on these scripts was to motivate these interruptions so that they were integrated within classical Hollywood's formal storytelling paradigm. The actual content of these interruptions was less important than the screenwriters' ability to make them part of the narrative whole. This distinction between the screenwriters' concern for story, and the star's concern for the actual content of the interruptions was specified at the script level. Consider an example from *Everything Happens To Me*: Miller's character Charlie sings a song. The screenwriters specify the theme, narrative, duration and even the style of the number, but allow Miller the freedom to exploit his act:

> CLOSER SHOT. CHARLIE.
>
> The words with which he continues are the words of the first verse of a number, the theme of which is:-
>
> There's a right way
> And a wrong way
> And the choice is up to you –
> Don't know what you can do

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[37] East, Max Miller - The Cheeky Chappie, pp.128-129
[38] "The Good Old Days," The Picturegoer 31 December 1938

till you try…

He speaks the verse as if it is part of the speech he is making and the audience should not realise at first that he is going into a number.

At the conclusion of the verse he starts to sing the refrain.[39]

Such practice allows Miller the freedom in which to 'put over a performance', and encouraged the spontaneity associated with his act, while at the same time controlling its direction and ensuring that these interruptions were anchored within the narrative framework of the film as a whole. Miller specified how this technique worked in practice: 'I know what the story's all about, and [director] Bill Beaudine keeps me on the right track. I know exactly what I'm supposed to do in each scene; then I work out my own dialogue and introduce my own funny bits'.[40] Such a technique means that the screenplay does not always need to specify content, only narrative direction. Consider this section from *Hoots Mon!*:

13. INT TOTTENHAM EMPIRE FULL SHOT. NIGHT.

SPECIALITY…..HARRY

Harry is on the stage, doing his act to a packed house. He is wearing the fantastic plus-four outfit which has made him famous.

14. CLOSE SHOT. ON STAGE

Harry continuing his act.

15. FULL SHOT. AUDIENCE (STOCK).

Howling with laughter.[41]

While this practice reduced the screenwriters' creative contribution and negated the supposed sanctity of the script, it did offer a pragmatic compromise to competing story and star demands. Miller was allotted time and space in which to perform his star trait. This satisfied the economic imperatives at force on the script. By assimilating these star interruptions within a classical storytelling

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[39] Dighton and Melford, "Everything Happens to Me", p.109
[40] Newnham, "Max Miller Faces Stardom," p.10
[41] Dighton and Henley, "Hoots Mon!" p.12

framework, the screenwriter maintains story/narrative value. Moreover, the screenwriter exerts some measure of control over the space, duration and frequency of the star interruptions. The content of these interruptions is determined by Miller, but the general shape, theme and aim of them (sell John Gielgud a vacuum) is determined by the screenwriter who maintains narrative integrity. What emerges is a mutually beneficial compromise, in which a production technique developed to maintain both star and story values.

While the screen representation of Miller's 'Cheeky Chappie' persona was widely praised within the trade press, the reception of the story organisation was mixed. *Kinematograph Weekly*, which was generally very supportive of the Miller films, highlights classical Hollywood values in its reviews. *Don't Get Me Wrong* was praised for, 'no flagging in the development…no time wasted in picking up the threads of the story'[42], which indicated the economical style of classical Hollywood. It lauded *Thank Evans* for a, 'good story…[and] showmanlike climax'.[43] *The Monthly Film Bulletin* was less positive, criticising story elements, calling *Don't Get Me Wrong* a 'run-away story', and *Everything Happens To Me*, 'thin entertainment'.[44] The combination of story and star elements occurred in two places: at the script stage, as the screenwriters attempted to marry classical storytelling techniques with the temporal and spatial requirements of Miller's star persona; and on set, where Miller would leave the script and improvise his lines within the constructed story boundaries.

The success of allying classical Hollywood storytelling techniques with the interruptions of Miller performing his act is illustrated through a close examination of *Hoots Mon!*. Miller's last pre-war film, the script plays explicitly with Miller's star persona, casting him as 'England's funniest comedian', Harry Hawkins. Sutton notes that the boundaries between Miller/Hawkins become blurred as the film opens with a familiar stage routine, further complicated retrospectively as documentaries about Miller use unacknowledged footage from the film as if it were an example of Miller's 'real' act.[45] The film is structured in

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[42] "Don't Get Me Wrong," Kinematograph Weekly March 18 1932: p.29
[43] "Thank Evans," Kinematograph Weekly May 5 1938
[44] "Don't Get Me Wrong," Monthly Film Bulletin March 1 1937: p.276, "Everything Happens To Me," Monthly Film Bulletin December 1 1938: p.276
[45] Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries, p.146 & fn.

seven sequences, indicated by the use of fades or lap dissolves between transitions. The use of such techniques to indicate a change in time and location was advocated in a number of the British manuals. By the late 1930s, most American manuals were instructing screenwriters to move away from a sequential narrative structure towards one based on a tripartite act structure, while several British manuals were still extolling the value of sequential composition. While manuals on both sides of the Atlantic situated the three-act structure as preferable due its association with Aristotelian composition, the sequential narrative had its advocates, specifying its British distinctiveness and variety hall roots. As a storytelling paradigm designed to exploit Miller's stage act, it works well, as each sequence allocates Miller the time and space in which to perform his act. However, this structure compromises classical Hollywood's storytelling structure, which supports the paradigmatic values of an internally closed, causally motivated chain of events leading to internal or psychological character change over the course of the narrative. The seven-part sequential structure is more difficult to causally link and motivate for the screenwriters. While such motivation was more successfully achieved in some sequences than others, the narrative structure demonstrates the way that the competing demands of the star system, classical Hollywood storytelling and indigenous values were negotiated within the composition of this film.

In the film of *Hoots Mon!*, the practice of Miller improvising his lines and adding gags to the specified dialogue worked with mixed results. There is certainly a manic energy about Miller's performance, with his gags following after each other. A comparison between script and screen reveals that some jokes were rewritten on set. When Harry leaves the stage after his first disastrous show in Glasgow, his line in the script reads, 'Blimey, are they dead out there? That's the first audience I ever played to after rigour mortis set in'.[46] Harry's actual line in the film is, 'Blimey, are they dead out there? They're stone cold. Like playing to a lot of icebergs'. While the improvement can be debated, it does demonstrate the way that dialogue was changed on set. Importantly, the narrative function of the line remains the same: Harry expresses his disbelief over his poor reception in front of Jenny, who then goes on stage to great applause. While Miller was

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[46] Dighton and Henley, "Hoots Mon!" p.39

free to change the specifics of the dialogue, the screenwriter dictates the narrative progression. This technique was unpredictable, particularly for the other actors. At several points in the film, the supporting cast stumble over their lines as they react to Miller's off-script remarks. That these slips were not re-shot may be indicative of the budgetary and time restrictions inherent in making films under such cost and time demands. Sutton states that, 'Miller's absorption into the conventions of the classical Hollywood style was complete'.[47] While much of the script composition is grounded in the norms of classical Hollywood storytelling, the demands of accommodating the two variety hall acts within the film's narrative boundaries problematises Sutton's assertion.

Storytelling in the classical Hollywood paradigm is based on the primacy of character motivated causality, which is usually precipitated by psychological character traits.[48] In order for the narrative action to be understandable – another basis of the classical Hollywood paradigm – the character's psychology must be understood, and therefore demonstrated, on screen. The character acts as the primal causal agent, and must therefore be a bundle of traits which lead them to act in certain ways. The character traits of Hawkins/Miller were already well established in the audience's mind through their understanding and the verisimilitude of Miller's star persona, which he effectively 'plays' in the character of Hawkins. Hawkins is recognisable as the loud-mouthed, quick-witted, saucy 'Cheeky Chappie'. The screenplay's inciting incident is when Jenny performs her impression of Hawkins' act. This begins a causal chain of events, initiated by Hawkins' pride. It is his pride which causes him to see the manager and have Jenny removed from the bill, and his pride which leads him to accept her wager and travels to Scotland to perform: 'I'm going to show that Shetland pony I'm a universal comic if I have to go to Scotland to do it'.[49] Pride remains Hawkins' defining characteristic, until the film ends with a reconciliation with Jenny, as they perform 'Mary From the Dairy' – the centrepiece of Hawkins' act - together on stage.

The development of Hawkins' and Jenny's relationship follows a familiar classical Hollywood romantic pattern: a male/female couple with apparently

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[47] Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries, p.145
[48] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.13
[49] Dighton and Henley, "Hoots Mon!" p.25

intractable differences overcome a series of obstacles until their final union at the end of the film. This storyline is 'planted' in the first direction of the screenplay, instructing that 'Mary From the Dairy' should be played on bagpipes, which foreshadows the final reconciliation in performance of Miller's act with Florence Desmond's Scottishness.[50] Such a story arc is driven by character motivated causality, is self-contained and represents change in both characters. However, as Sutton states, male/female unity in *Hoots Mon!* is, 'mediated through the codes of performance itself rather than through the more common romance'.[51] This distinction is clearly demonstrated in the hospital sequence. Hawkins and Chips have been beaten up at a Scottish dinner, after Jenny warned the hosts that Hawkins and Chips were cockneys. She feels guilty, and goes to the hospital to see them. In the script, Jenny arrives, and sees, 'Harry in bed with Nurse Roberts at his bedside. Harry is obviously quite well and is patting Nurse Roberts' hand, gazing at her adoringly…As she sees this, all her anxiety turns to anger'.[52] These directions indicate Jenny's sexual jealousy and her romantic inclinations towards Hawkins. This motivates her to act and gain revenge, which provides the comic sequences that follow. However, in the final film, an additional line was added. As Jenny sees Hawkins flirting with Nurse Roberts, Hawkins says, 'Jenny McTavish? Pay no attention to her. She's just an impersonator. I'm the greatest comedian in the world'. Jenny's face then turns from anxiety to anger, and leads to her actions. This change replaces romantic motivations with Jenny's own professional pride. The final performance can thus be viewed as a professional reconciliation, as well as both characters' personal triumph over pride. This change between the script and the screen is important, as it shifts the thematic emphasis away from the romantic story which might be expected from a classical Hollywood organisation to a film which is about the value of performance. Both Miller and Florence Desmond play thinly veiled versions of their stage acts, while classical Hollywood narrative organisation is seconded, or at least compromised, to facilitate the performance of both acts.

The subverted structure of the romance narrative also expresses the key thematic element of nationality and British regional appeal. Writing such

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[50] Ibid., p.1
[51] Sutton, A Chorus of Raspberries, p.147
[52] Dighton and Henley, "Hoots Mon!" p.78

'Britishness' was a key concern of contemporary screenwriting manuals. Buchanan argued for a distinction between, '*British films* and *films made in Britain*'.[53] The use and exploitation of British locations, themes and concerns was a key value espoused by British screenwriting manuals. The intended domestic and Commonwealth distribution of *Hoots Mon!* allowed the screenwriters to incorporate such indigenous concerns. The conflict between Hawkins and Jenny is a tribal distinction between a cockney and a Scot. Hawkins/Miller's specifically Southern appeal is challenged by Jenny as an interloper: 'You may be a star in London, but if you ever played the provinces – oh, my – they'd skin you alive – and if they did that to you in England, imagine what they'd do to you in Scotland'.[54] Some of the script's anti-Scottish humour is toned down in the final screen version: Chips' line, 'them Scotch haven't got any sense of humour, ' is changed to, 'the Scots have got a sense of humour, a great sense of humour, but it's different to here'.[55] The nationalistic rivalry between Hawkins and Jenny, represented as an aggressively English/Scottish divide, is mediated by Miller's knowing performance. When in a Scottish club, Hawkins and Chips pretend to be Scots, and perform a parody of a Scottish song, with squealing bagpipes and every Scottish cliché Miller can think to introduce. The apparently racist overtones are contained by Miller's performance. When asked where in Scotland he was born, Hawkins replies, 'Scotland Yard'. Miller's performance reveals the construction of such nationalistic/regional identities, with a playful self-knowledge.

The difficulty of accommodating star elements within classical Hollywood storytelling techniques is demonstrated clearly in a scene which bridges Hawkins' visit to the man he believes to be the Scottish manager, and his first performance in Glasgow. The narrative purpose of the scene is to illustrate Hawkins' belief that he has the manager on his side against Jenny, and to act as a counterpoint to the next scene, where his act 'dies' onstage. It includes slapstick comedy with Chips, which originates from Hawkins' assertion that he is friendly with the manager. The humorous aside is grounded in narrative progression. However, in the film Miller improvises the gags, and as such, loses the narrative

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[53] Buchanan, Film Making, p.13
[54] Dighton and Henley, "Hoots Mon!" p.23
[55] Ibid., p.25

function of the dialogue. Onscreen, Miller tells a gag about a girl he has seen in the office and another about the manager's swimming pool, making up a conversation the audience knows he did not have. Miller appears to be adlibbing his lines, rubbing his hand over his face, a tic which reoccurs when it seems as if he comes off script. Hawkins/Miller says, 'I thought I was in a bar'; the ectopic deployment of his stage act in a part of the film where it has not been controlled or motivated by classical Hollywood storytelling techniques illustrates the truth of this. The movement between motivated narrative and non-motivated interruption highlights how the screenwriters anchored such episodes in the rest of the film. Finally, Miller returns to the narrative, and the script, with the line 'what are we waiting here for?', an apt comment, given the suspension of classical Hollywood storytelling rules during his adlibbed riff.

On returning to the script, the storytelling utilises several classical Hollywood storytelling techniques to manage the transition in time and space from the car to variety hall that evening. Hawkins' final line in the scene is a dialogue hook. In order to make a good impression on the Scottish crowd, he is going to use his best material, and open with, 'the one about the beans'. Hawkins and Chips laugh, and the audience expectation is directed to seeing Hawkins tell that gag. Following the fade in transition to the next scene, Hawkins is on stage, laughing at that gag. Further, Hawkins' laughter carries over on the soundtrack from the car to hall, linking his laughter about the 'beans' gag in the car with his laughter about the gag in the variety hall. The audience immediately understands where the action is, and what has occurred. Further, the final shot of the scene is on Hawkins' car, with the legend: '~~England's~~ Scotland's funniest comedian' emblazoned across the door. This signals Hawkins' action in the next scene, and the sentiment is juxtaposed with the stone-faced audience as Hawkins 'dies' onstage. While Miller's improvised dialogue may have maintained star values, at times it compromised story value and narrative clarity.

While the screenwriters utilised classical Hollywood storytelling techniques to anchor the main variety sequences within the narrative of the film, Miller has a song routine in the hospital which is not motivated and is a jarring narrative interruption. Hawkins and Chips escape from the matron, aided by the young boy Alec. He hides them in the children's scarlet fever ward, where

Hawkins performs a song, to the delight of the children. Performing with a group of children was a stable trait of Miller's cinematic persona. Such an organisation gave the character an audience within the diegesis, which facilitated the verisimilitude of his act, while also broadening Miller's appeal to a younger demographic. However, the screenwriters struggled to locate this sequence with causally motivated action. Hawkins and Chips' goal is clearly defined: to find their clothes and escape from the hospital. Alec's help is also well-motivated: Hawkins (unknowingly) gave him free entrance to his show. The children want Hawkins to entertain them. The script attempts to motivate his change in attitude:

> Harry is pleased with their enthusiasm. Chips looks worried.
>
> CHIPS: (impatiently)
> Come on, Harry, perhaps they've stopped looking for us, let's get out of here. Don't waste your time entertaining a lot of kids.
>
> HARRY: (indignantly)
> D'you call entertaining a lot of poor little kids a waste of time? You ought to be ashamed of yourself.[56]

The sequence breaks the motivated chain, as Hawkins tells a joke, then performs a song. Chips attempts to persuade him to leave, to which Hawkins/Miller replies three times, 'I'm enjoying myself'. Hawkins' psychological and character motivation for remaining in the ward and performing is weak, particularly compared to his previously well-motivated desire to leave the hospital. The script's original intention of motivating the sequence out of Hawkins' self-perception as an entertainer offers the possibility of maintaining a consistent character trait, particularly considering the value both Hawkins and Jenny attach to notions of performance, but this impulse is lost during Miller's improvised routine, and replaced by the weak and out of place statement of enjoying himself. Without the diegetic stage and audience, the performance of Miller's act in this sequence would always have been difficult to locate within a storytelling structure without it feeling like an interruption. The demands for Miller to perform his act, coupled with the improvised technique which ignored narrative

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[56] Ibid., p.95

cues from the script meant that classical Hollywood storytelling techniques were superseded in this sequence.

The screenplay makes use of another tenet of classical Hollywood storytelling in a single instance of a dangling clause, but it is deployed unconventionally.[57] The dangling clause is used as a part of the causal chain as a strategy to unify narratives. Each clause has an effect, but that effect may not occur until later on in the narrative. The early deployment of that information helps to maintain the closed value of the narrative world, and a strong sense of unity. A dangling clause is used in the screenplay of *Hoots Mon!*, although its value is comic rather than narrative. The use of a narrative convention to bring about a comic moment is not uncommon, but such a use of a dangling clause usually serves both a comic and narrative function. In *Hoots Mon*, the dangling clause functions outside the classically unified narrative, existing as interruption with only a comic purpose. When Hawkins decides to go to Scotland, he proclaims that, 'they'll be throwing flowers at me over the spotlights', to which Chips replies, 'I hope they don't forget to take 'em out of the pots'.[58] The line itself is unremarkable, appearing to be another one of Miller's throw-away gags. The narrative information is not signalled within the screenplay or within the mise-en-scene of the film as being especially important, except that it is the final exchange to take place in London before the change in locale to Scotland. However, the final shot of the film is of Hawkins and Jenny united on the Glasgow stage, with flowers being thrown onstage. A flowerpot lands on Hawkins' head, and he remarks, 'Blimey – one did forget to take it out of the pot!'.[59] This is the final line of the film, which then fades out.

The isolated use of the dangling clause, plus the location within the narrative of both the set-up and the payoff of this gag would indicate that this is an important moment within the narrative, yet the significance or meaning of this final shot is unclear. Perhaps it acts as a representation of Hawkins' comeuppance, where his fears of being pelted while onstage are realised, and his pride at being a national comedian is pricked. Yet this reading is undermined by

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[57] Kristin Thompson, Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.12
[58] Dighton and Henley, "Hoots Mon!" pp.25-26
[59] Ibid., p.136

the other flowers onstage, the audience's applause, the smile on his face as the camera fades out, and the narrative resolution offered by Jenny and Hawkins' final performance together. A more likely understanding is that this is simply one more gag thrown in for the audience's pleasure, located where it is as Miller/Hawkins needs to be taking his bow. Such an interpretation of this narrative organisation sees the screenwriters utilising the techniques of classical Hollywood storytelling to achieve an effect which ostentatiously sits outside of the closed, unified story world. This use places the variety hall value of placing humour – one final gag – above the demands of a unified narrative. This instance of practice exemplifies the screenwriters' approach to utilising classical Hollywood techniques to express a distinctly British star and theme; to paraphrase Miller himself, they are British screenwriters, but they used the American style.

While the star system may have been an economic boon to the film industry, it presented screenwriters attempting to utilise it with serious difficulties when attempting to accommodate star demands with their existing storytelling values. These tensions may have been more easily reconciled with stars whose unique traits were more obviously 'cinematic'. While Miller adapted his technique to a faster, more Americanised style of delivery which was highly praised, his fundamental trait of performing on a stage to an audience was inherently static and difficult to motivate. This presented problems for the screenwriters, as such an organisation of story elements compromised the compositional values of British and American screenwriting. British screenwriting manuals tended to resent the star system as a Hollywood invention which compromised story values, but when manuals did extol the value of stars, it was often stars whose persona was created specifically for the screen. This was partly a symptom of the field's continuous desire to differentiate itself from the stage - the source of many British stars – as screenwriting attempted to establish its own cultural legitimacy. This impulse tried to negate the difficulties faced by the Warner Brothers screenwriters as they attempted to integrate Max Miller's variety stage act into the diegesis and storytelling norms of the cinema. The result was a

formula which mixed improvised variety entertainment with classical Hollywood storytelling and distinctly British themes and concerns.

While the pleasure of the films always lay in the exploitation of Miller's stage act, the critical response improved after Launder's first script, as the screenwriters attempted to integrate Miller's performances within the causal narrative structures of classical Hollywood storytelling. The ratio of star to story demands remained contested from film to film, and indeed from scene to scene. At times a system of use emerged which proved an elegant compromise between story and star elements: the use of signs at the beginning of films, and the recurring trope of Miller's entrapment prior to the denouement illustrate a nuanced understanding of how such competing values might be utilised effectively. When properly motivated and deployed, Miller's act runs smoothly with the narrative flow; it is a credit to the screenwriters that it does not disrupt the classical Hollywood value of invisible storytelling. It is little wonder that such successful instances of practice were reused from film to film. Such recycling may compromise a prevalent view of screenwriting as a creative position, but it was in keeping with the frugal approach to story, cost and time institutionalised within Warner Brothers. At other times, the overriding need to showcase Miller's act overwhelmed the screenwriters' technique, and his repartee feels like the non-narrative interruption it so obviously was. While the screenwriters attempted to contain such episodes within a classically motivated story framework, the effect was to heighten the sense of narrative disruption.

This can be attributed to the institutional practice of allowing Miller to adlib or rewrite some sections of his dialogue. Such practice was specified in the script, as the writers indicated a 'space' for Miller to fill with his routines. The benefit was in the exploitation of his distinct, British variety act. The cost however, was in the abdication of narrative authority, and the loss of classical unities as Miller's routines moved further away from the values of economy, unity and clarity. While the studio attempted to manage such interruptions by the director keeping him on course, at times Miller broke down the façade of classical storytelling, especially when such spaces were poorly motivated. The screenplays written for Max Miller demonstrate the willingness and ability of British screenwriters to utilise storytelling techniques from a variety of industrial

and screenwriting paradigms in order to negotiate the economic demands of writing for the star system with the values of story and indigenous themes within the same work. From these films, one can pick out instances of classical Hollywood storytelling, of a thematic approach targeted for a distinctly British audience, and the non-cinematic pleasures of the variety hall. These elements sit together uneasily at times, while at other times a sophisticated system of use emerges. Unlike classical Hollywood, with its overarching values of narrative and profit, such a diverse response from British screenwriters mirrors the diversity in values and practices which characterised the industry during the 1930s. The case of Max Miller demonstrates how the institutionalisation of the star system was an uneasy one, driven at times by economic imperatives rather than by story or cultural need. Yet the screenwriters working at Teddington managed such an integration, and produced a storytelling technique which proved popular and critically successful, and allowed Miller to be both himself and his characters. The careful negotiation of indigenous screenwriting values with the financial and industrial realities of the star system led in this case to the emergence of a hybrid system of star use. Some of the compositional values were maintained in certain cases. However, the economic and technical revolution presented by the coming of sound challenged these British values.

Chapter 7. 'Striking Out'?: British Screenwriting's Negotiation of Sound as Technological Change in Theory and in Practice

> The Talkie has as yet no technique, but it must be evolved. Why cannot Britain take the bold step, ignoring what America has done except in so far as it is a help, strike out and create something entirely new in Talkies so as to give the world a lead?[1]
>
> Herbert Thompson (1929)

The coming of sound was a destabilising influence as the film industry struggled to understand, assimilate and institutionalise this new technology. The major Hollywood studios signed with Western Electric's system in May 1928, and they faced a wholesale conversion of equipment and production processes.[2] It was not immediately obvious to all in Britain that a similar conversion was inevitable. However, the transition did occur, and was initially met more quickly by the exhibitors than the producing firms. By 1930, most first run cinemas in Britain had installed or ordered sound equipment; by 1933, only a handful of British cinemas were without sound.[3] The chapter's title refers in part to Thompson's plea. Its aim is to chart the way that British screenwriting manuals attempted to 'strike out' into the unknown world of sound, and establish a technique of sound usage which supported and maintained the values which British screenwriting held as essential to their conception of cinema. The evolution of British screenwriting's sound technique was diverse, divisive and hard-fought. Compared to Hollywood's relatively smooth transition to sound, the evolution of a British technique appeared shambolic at times, which gives the alternative meaning to the chapter's title: the British attempts to create an alternative sound technique ultimately ended in failure; it was a 'strike out'.

The coming of sound was a far more traumatic change for British film producers than for their Hollywood counterparts, who were better able to absorb the costs of refitting, and exert some measure of control over the time and scale of change. While the 'big five' film companies were able to post record profits

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[1] Herbert Thompson, "The Truth About the Talkies," The Film Weekly June 17 1929: p.9
[2] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.298
[3] Robert Murphy, "Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain," Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 4.2 (1984): p.151

despite the Wall Street Crash, Britain was subject to a technological advance for which it was ill prepared.[4] The introduction of sound underlined cinema's industrial aspects. Cinema's pretences of art were challenged due to the high cost of fitting production and exhibition spaces for sound, which necessitated an economic return. Writing in 1929, Charques noted, 'The "talkies" have intensified the industrial aspect of film production to an extent that makes all other aspects relatively insignificant; what was in substance still an art only a year ago has become, for all practical purposes, an industry pure and simple.'[5] Hollywood production supported an industrial outlook through the classical system. This new technology presented a new set of limitations and possibilities which demanded a reassessment of the *kind* of stories cinema told, along with *how* they were told. Classical Hollywood's 'package' - with its twin aims of narrative and profit - quickly assimilated sound into its already-constituted story paradigm.[6] By the end of the transition years, a stable technique of sound usage was established in the discourses and practices that supported classical Hollywood's hierarchy of values. These included a specific conception of how sound should be organised in screenwriting practice. Neale notes that the use of sound and sound track, 'are subject to construction, are as much the product of rules and conventions as the perspex image, on the one hand, and the complete and complex narrative on the other'. [7] The raft of American manuals published during the transition period advised would-be screenwriters how to write for sound films. These negotiated and established the constructions and conventions of writing for sound in order to reinforce classical Hollywood's style.[8]

The arrival of sound, and particularly classical Hollywood's conception of its use, challenged the values privileged in British screenwriting. British screenwriting was more diverse and not so strongly based on an industrial conception of cinema. The doxic principles enshrined in classical Hollywood and exported to Britain through the economic and cultural capital of American production forced an uneasy negotiation between the use and purpose of sound,

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[4] Ibid.: p.156
[5] R.D. Charques, "The Future of Talking Films," Fortnightly Review 1 July 1929: pp.90-91
[6] Cowie, "Storytelling: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Classical Narrative," p.182
[7] Steve Neale, Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour (London: MacMillan, 1985), p.96
[8] David Bordwell, The Way Hollywood Tells It, Story and Style in Modern Movies (London: University of California Press, 2006), p.247 fn.213

and British screenwriting principles. The equivalent raft of British manuals did not appear during the years of technical transition, but bloomed later, between 1933-1937. The negotiation of sound as a production process was divergent and often resistant to the conception and utilisation of sound delineated by the discourses and practices of classical Hollywood. In a number of manuals, an alternative system of acoustic values was proposed in theory, if not established in practice. Through many British manuals there runs a strong anti-Hollywood sentiment that is articulated in terms of mechanical reproduction and art. While some British manuals adopted a more transatlantic approach, others rejected classical Hollywood's techniques and principles – particularly the purpose and use of dialogue - and proposed alternative acoustic practices, based on a different hierarchy of sound and narrative values. British screenwriting's negotiation and institutionalisation of sound as a new technology, of classical Hollywood's construction of its use, and its own narrative principles is explicated below. The impact of sound in practice is examined in the next chapter by examining its affect on the career of screen and manual writer Adrian Brunel.

The stability of the classical Hollywood paradigm institutionalised sound within the existing mode and style of production. These stable foundations allowed American screenwriters to experiment, innovate and make mistakes while using the new technology, but within the already-constituted hierarchy of values extant from silent production. Bordwell notes that, 'sound technique was on the whole brought into conformity with silent filmmaking norms. Throughout the practices and discourses of the technical agencies from 1927 to 1932, one finds a highly coherent set of analogies between image and sound, between the visual and auditory construction of narrative time and space'.[9] Such coherence is grounded in, and built upon, the values of profit and a specific understanding of narrative which drove classical Hollywood production. Neale notes that sound, 'contributed both to a decisive orientation of space, time and narrative around individual characters and to a rigid codification of cinematic story-telling according to the convention of what has come to be termed "classical *decoupage*"'.[10] Such a precise orientation of narrative values, and the

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[9] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.301
[10] Neale, Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour, p.95

conventions of classical *decoupage* were not so firmly institutionalised in British practice.

Brunel's comment that, 'there is little difference between the technique of the talkie and silent film production,' was typical of the British response. However, the lack of a stable, overarching production paradigm such as that of classical Hollywood meant that the British transition to sound was diverse, divisive and prolonged.[11] In his summary of 1929, S.G. Rayment looked back over the year's production, while looking forward to the creation of a new British talkie technique:

> The talkies of 1929 have shown a painful tendency to run in grooves, and we had more than enough trial scenes, back-stage stories and crook melodramas. The greatest asset of the old silent picture was the limitless variety of stories it was possible to portray, and now we have passed from the experimental stages, there is every reason to anticipate we shall be almost as free in our choice of themes and settings with the talking pictures.[12]

The American transition to sound production was not straightforward, but the existence of the classical Hollywood paradigm meant that the field knew the *kind* of stories it would tell and, largely, *how* they would be told. Screenwriter Dudley Nichols's experience typified the initial confusion within the industry: 'When I came to Hollywood in the spring of 1929, sound had just come in, and nobody really knew what the laws of the sound film were. We had to find out by doing. We made ghastly mistakes'.[13] Hollywood's industrial system established doxic norms of sound use, incorporating it into systems like classical *decoupage*. These quickly became perceived as 'natural', but are actually a construction which supports classical Hollywood's economic and cultural dominance.

Initially, however, the Hollywood studios faced a period of instability during the transition to sound. There was a demand for story material which utilised sound, specifically dialogue. This was quickly met as the studios owned a large number of theatrical story properties, which could be swiftly adapted for

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[11] Brunel, Film Production, p.11

[12] S.G. Rayment, ed., The Kinematograph Year Book 1930 (London: Kinematograph Publications, 1930), p.11

[13] Dudley Nichols, "Meeting of Class in Screenwriting", January 3 1940, Lees/Rinaldo Papers, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles

the screen.[14] The late 1920s and early 1930s saw an influx of theatrical writers come from the east, schooled in the dramatic use of sound and dialogue. However, a new combined technique was required to use the technology effectively. Smith noted, 'If the talkie becomes an overwhelming success, you can count on a new line of directors and scenarists. New ways will have to be found to tell stories'.[15] These new ways included the institutionalisation of dialogue as a tool with which to convey narrative. However, initial forays relied too heavily on theatrical technique. Nichols noted, 'The conclusion of the average producer, director and writer was that everything that had happened up to 1928 had ceased to exist. It took people years to learn that they were making pictures – not re-making plays'.[16] The use of sound during the transition years overwhelmed the established storytelling techniques of classical Hollywood. A new technique had to be established, distinct from the theatrical usage of sound (specifically dialogue), which combined the narrative possibilities of sound with the established visual norms of cinema. The industrial discourses quickly corrected this overbalance, and placed the use of sound firmly within the existing narrative construction of classical Hollywood. William B. de Mille described the sound film not as a new medium, requiring writers to forget what they had already learned from silent film production, but rather,

> The vocal photoplay is a new combination of two older arts rather than the creation of a new art, and, because essentially new only as to combination, the major problem to be solved at this time is to prevent the technic of one art robbing it of values contributed by the other. Talkie technic must be visually that of the motion-picture and only orally that of the stage. This means that the narrative form of the talkie cannot quite follow that of the drama; its percentage of eye-drama to ear-drama must be considerably greater than on stage.[17]

The technical discourses during the transitional years helped to manage the emergence of a screenwriting technique distinct from theatrical usage. Robert E. Sherwood commented on the inappropriate bleeding of theatrical technique into talking pictures. He recalls watching a film, where a character is handed a letter. The character proceeded to: 'read every word of it to the audience, though there

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[14] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.146
[15] Frederick James Smith, "The Silent Drama Speaks," Liberty 1928: p.35
[16] Nichols, "Meeting of Class in Screenwriting"
[17] William de Mille, "The Screen Speaks," Scribner's Magazine April 1929: pp.370-371

was no occasion for him to do so. On the stage, he would have to read it aloud; otherwise, the audience would have no way of knowing its contents. On the screen, a close-up of the letter could easily be inserted'.[18] Such an example illustrates the 'ghastly mistakes' occurring in practice during the Hollywood transition, and the industrial discourses working to correct it. An insert conveys the expositional information contained in the letter in an efficient and unobtrusive form, and conforms to classical Hollywood's core narrative value of economy. The technical limitations of the stage require the character to read the letter, but onscreen visual storytelling would offer a more economical deployment of story material as advocated by Sherwood. Similarly, the transitional years saw the overuse of dialogue stemming from theatrical influences. In an interview for *Hollywood Filmograph*, Howard Estabrook contended, 'The idea that characters must always be saying something to each other to keep up the action is wrong…The difficulty is in sensing when speech should be used, and when dispensed with'.[19] Unlike the stage, where the majority of story information is conveyed through dialogue, the screen can often utilise the visual as an economical mode of telling the story. The discourses distinguished cinematic from theatrical acoustic technique by elevating the value of an economic use of dialogue. A judicious use privileges visual over acoustic storytelling. This reconnected Hollywood's sound production with the visual values which existed in silent production. Nichols noted,

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[18] Robert E. Sherwood, "Renaissance in Hollywood," American Mercury 1929: p.434
[19] "Studios are trying to do away with too much dialogue," Hollywood Filmograph January 3 1931: p.26

> I found out, for one thing, that pictures shouldn't talk any more than they had to. That is, if you wrote the script and it didn't tell itself to a deaf person – it was a bad motion picture. Even the silent pictures used titles. That, in a way, was an admission of failure. In silent pictures they tried to cover up that failure with funny titles – trying to make people laugh where often a laugh didn't belong. This often interrupted the musical flow of the picture. But even today dialogue is often used as titles once were used. In the screen medium, the important things is what people do. There is hardly anything that can't be symbolised in an action. A lot of people think that literature of action is inferior literature – a inferior kind of story telling. Yet it is really the greatest literature. If I can tell you what a man did – how he came into a room, how he went out again – and by that action I can tell you what kind of man he was – that's great storytelling. So the screen medium is really a medium of action. I know writers tend to write beautiful conversation. That is a mistake.[20]

This highlights classical Hollywood's core values of continuity, economy and visual storytelling. The introduction of sound, and the input of stage playwrights during the transition years may have temporarily upset the hierarchy of values, but the field's discourses quickly re-established the primacy of visual storytelling. Indeed, these discourses hoped a new technique would avoid the failures in practice common in silent production (such as the breaking of visual and spatial continuity by intertitles), and create a distinctive screenwriting paradigm which could express classical Hollywood's core narrative values.

This was achieved by a multifaceted conceptualisation of sound to support key narrative values.[21] Sound was used to unify temporal and spatial continuity. Music functioned as a factor in narrative continuity, acting like glue to join scenes which became ever more fragmented.[22] For the screenwriter, scene-to-scene comprehension, ongoing causality and the organisation of time and space were institutionalised through the use of 'dialogue hooks'.[23] Although this term was not used during the 1930s, the technique was utilised in practice, and illustrated in several example scripts from screenwriting manuals as good practice. By 1937 this practice was well established. Frances Marion's manual uses Robert E. Sherwood's script of *Marco Polo* as an example. Notice how

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[20] Nichols, "Meeting of Class in Screenwriting"
[21] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.248
[22] Ibid., p.303
[23] Thompson, Storytelling in Film and Television, p.23. A dialogue hook is a line delivered at the end of one scene which prepares the audience for the next scene. Thompson uses an example from *Jurassic Park*. Hammond says, 'Grant's like me, he's a digger'. The cut moves the locale to an archaeological dig. Although Grant has not appeared, the audience is prepared for his introduction, and they know that he likes to dig.

music, dialogue hooking and the visual images establish a smooth continuity in the transition between locations:

> NICOLO, *looks at Marco*: The smallest things have changed the world. Marco is my son! He understands. (*pointing at a map*). Here is your route. You sail first for the Port of Acre – a fortified city on the coast of Asia – now held by the Crusaders…
>
> *The CAMERA MOVES DOWN to the map, following Nicolo's finger from Venice to Acre. Perhaps there might be double exposure here, showing the map and at the same time a Venetian vessel crossing the sea, camel caravans crossing the desert, etc. At any rate, Nicolo's words continue on the Sound Track. Weird music should come through, too.*
>
> NICOLO'S VOICE: From Acre, you go overland by caravan – across the Arabian desert into Persia – to Samarkand – and over the boundless plains of Tartary where rode the fierce horseman Genghis Khan – and so into the great land of Cathay – to the incomparable city of Pekin – where lives Kublai Khan, ruler of the earth and the sun, the moon, and the stars…
>
> *The music swells to a crescendo.*
>
> (*fading*). Farewell, my son, Marco Polo. God's benison go with you.[24]

Continuity is managed through a combination of visual and acoustic cues which prepares the viewer for the change in time and location. Dialogue hooking manages the understanding of the journey, supported by the double-exposure visuals. Audience expectation is created through the exposition describing Pekin. This prepares the audience for the transition to a new location in the next scene, and creates an expectation of who might inhabit that location (Kublai Khan), and his character traits (powerful and exotic). Nicolo's final dialogue line foreshadows elements of danger which Marco will have to overcome in this new location. Such instances of practice demonstrate how sound was integrated into the classical Hollywood system, and utilised to maintain the key value of continuity.

The introduction of sound necessitated a more prominent role in the production process for the script, and so the screenwriter. Writing in 1928, Smith

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[24] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, p.239

noted, 'Screen characters today frequently have dialogue given them in the editing process totally at variance with what the original scenario called for. This is to cover flaws which develop in the original story. Sound films cannot be made in this haphazard fashion'.[25] The introduction of sound required greater story preparation. Flaws which could have previously been covered by intertitles could not be covered with dialogue at the expense of characterisation. Dialogue became the key acoustic value as it supported continuity, the centrality of character and character-motivated action as the primary impulses of classical Hollywood filmmaking. Contemporary manuals go so far as to state that story *is* character, and that changing one necessitates changing the other.[26] This increased the role and status of the screenwriter, as noted by Strauss: 'What of the quality of the conversation in the 'talkies'? What will the actors say? Who will write it for them? As it is, there is a shortage of good writers in the industry. Where will we find Oscar Wildes and Bernard Shaws to write dialogue for the 'talkies'?'.[27]

This shortage of writers accounts for the influx of writers from the east, as well as for the raft of American screenwriting manuals which bloomed in order to ease the transition from silent to sound technique. In 1934 Stuart noted, 'Before the introduction of talkies, the writer was usually a down-trodden wretch to whom nobody listened…Then talkies arrived. Words became important. The construction of a screen plot suddenly demanded more than mere technical knowledge'.[28] The complex deployment of visual and acoustic resources while maintaining the story and production values of classical Hollywood production, as demonstrated by Sherwood, became an increasingly complex and creative process. The use of sound required a more complete conceptualisation of all aspects of the film at the script stage. The screenwriter was required to specify the visual and acoustic requirements on the page, and present a complete, unified 'whole' before production could begin. Similar demands occurred in Britain. Lee notes, 'Years ago, in the old silent period, directors used to shout 'off the cuff''. That meant improvise as they went along. It lead to waste and muddle…The birth of the talkie killed all that…the supervisor insists on a complete film-on-

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[25] Smith, "The Silent Drama Speaks," p.35
[26] McKee, Story, p.107
[27] Jerome M. Strauss, "Niblo Advises Cautious Steps in Sound Field," Entertainment July 1929
[28] Douglas Stuart, "The Rise of the Writer," Film Weekly July 13 1934

paper before work commences on the floor'.[29] Sound increased the cultural capital of the writer. Once established, these techniques were codified as the norms of sound production. They were exported - via the discourses and products of Hollywood - as 'natural' principles, essential to cinema's visual specificity.

The introduction of sound as a new technology was quickly assimilated into classical Hollywood's already-constituted system of values. Sound both as a material and as a concept supported and was supported by the primary narrative values of character, causality and continuity. While the transition years saw some experimental technique as a complete understanding of the range and possibilities of sound were explored, the destabilising influence of the change was controlled by Hollywood's economic capital, and the surety of its filmmaking paradigm. British cinema had neither Hollywood's firm financial base, nor its overarching story paradigm. Hollywood's industrial model was based on a specific conception of narrative which supported and was supported by the introduction of sound. British film production lacked such a unified production model, let alone narrative which structured film production. The institutionalisation of the technological possibilities and limits of sound was approached cautiously following some uneven usage during the early years of sound. As late as 1936, Brunel noted, 'Unless the difficulties at present existing in ordinary sound production are considerably reduced, I think we shall be forced to adopt silent shooting with post-synchronisation in certain circumstances, such as in studio long shots where there are several characters speaking – as we already do in many exterior scenes'.[30] The uncertainty surrounding the technical usage of sound technology meant that British screenwriting lacked certainty when establishing patterns and norms of practice.

Classical Hollywood's specific conception of sound usage challenged the diverse notions of cinema and storytelling existing within the British field. While the Hollywood system was able to absorb and assimilate the challenges that sound presented, many in British cinema perceived sound as a threat to their already-constituted notions of cinema and screenwriting. The *de facto* change in practice and conception from art to industry challenged the key values held by

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[29] Lee, Money for Film Stories, p.27
[30] Brunel, Film Production, p.13

the British field about what kind of stories cinema should tell, and how those stories should be told. The negotiation of this new technology was difficult as it challenged several of these values in theory and in practice. While American manuals were published in a bloom during the transitional period in order to institutionalise sound within the existing hierarchy of classical Hollywood, a number of British manuals were published later, between 1933-1937. By then sound production had been successfully assimilated in classical Hollywood production, and it was clear that the use of sound in cinema was not a passing fad. From the earliest days of the transition through to the late 1930s, British manuals constructed a paradigmatic utilisation of sound that was resistant to the classical Hollywood model in conception and in deployment. These manuals attempted to construct a different hierarchy which supported the existing values of British screenwriting: a focus on movement, on visual storytelling as a defining quality differentiating screenwriting from the stage, on film as art, and on film as an international medium. Charques noted that, 'a new technique of production is growing up, and with it, it seems, a new psychology of cinema values'.[31] The manuals attempted to negotiate the new technology and classical Hollywood's cultural and economic capital in order to create this different system of values.

There is a strong sense of betrayal and resentment towards Hollywood in the British manuals for the arrival of sound. Following relatively low levels of production and Hollywood's dominance during the 1920s, there was a sense within the field that the late 1920s were beginning to see a British advance in practice. This was negated by the rewiring costs and resultant downturn in production during the transition to sound. There were redundancies as studios closed. A number of workers within the field did not survive the transition to sound. Brunel's description of the transition is strong but not atypical: 'All that is certain is that restful silent drama was stabbed in the back'.[32] This sense of resentment was intensified by the timing of the transition. Buchanan described Hollywood's development of sound pictures:

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[31] Charques, "The Future of Talking Films," p.90
[32] Brunel, Nice Work, p.156

> She knew British silent film production was on the upward path; she knew the trouble taken and money spent on studios – and she knew our films were improving daily. She knew, too, that her first talking productions would be met with criticism, but that by a combination of showmanship, enormous publicity, ever-increasingly technical efficiency and weight of numbers, she would make us *like them* in the near future. She succeeded.[33]

Notice Buchanan's denial of the natural worth of sound production. He describes the moulding of public preference towards the talkies via the powerful economic and cultural capital of classical Hollywood's discourses. Such a stance highlights his understanding of sound practice as a matter of distinction; a construction of use created through the doxic principles emanating from Hollywood which have no intrinsic value, but support the existing power structures in the industry. It is possible that the emergence of an alternative British sound practice articulated by the screenwriting manuals may have been motivated by the desire to produce a system that was anything but Hollywood.

However, British resistance was not uniform across the field. Some British filmmakers embraced sound production from its earliest commercial conception. Herbert Wilcox found early success in 1929 producing talkies for his British and Dominions Company.[34] As early as 1928, producer and director George Pearson heralded sound as 'A British Daybreak'. He called for a new scenario technique which,

> will be simpler in subject, in theme, in story, in plot. Emotional appeal will be basic and elemental; there will be cinematic gradation of crises; we shall lead up to the tensely dramatic moment by skilful cinematic visualisation based on the best in silent technique, but at tension point we shall fire the emotions with the wonderful power of the spoken word.[35]

Pearson's rallying call conceptualises a new storytelling paradigm based on the classical narrative tenets of theme, rising action and climax. He proposes a synthesis of existing silent film and stage techniques. An economy of storytelling is implied throughout. His article outlines the kind of storytelling techniques he envisages British sound production utilising. However, Pearson does not outline the specifics of how such a vision might be realised.

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[33] Buchanan, Films, p.61
[34] Murphy, "Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain," p.153
[35] George Pearson, "A British Daybreak," The Bioscope December 26 1928: p.54

This positive attitude towards sound was reflected in Seton Margrave's screenwriting manual *Successful Film Writing* (1937), which was perhaps the most Americanised of all the British manuals of this period. Margrave, a former sub-title writer and film critic for the *Daily Mail*, illustrated good practice with script examples from *The Ghost Goes West* (1935, dir. Rene Clair). The highest grossing British film of 1936, *The Ghost Goes West* was adapted for the screen by Robert E. Sherwood from a *Punch* short story by Eric Keown. Street calls the film 'an "indigenous" text with "exportable" ambitions'.[36] In many ways, the film falls neatly into the classical Hollywood story paradigm. Margrave's advice incorporates a mixture of techniques and values of classical Hollywood and British screenwriting. There is certainly an acknowledgment of classical Hollywood technique – Frances Marion is referred to throughout – if not a wholesale conversion to American practice. Like *The Ghost Goes West*, Margrave's manual might be said to demonstrate 'indigenous' advice with 'exportable' ambitions. However, many others in British screenwriting were concerned that the practicalities of sound production would threaten the indigenous values they held.

The primary value which British screenwriting manuals felt to be under threat from sound was their understanding of movement as the key to cinema's specificity as a medium. This filmmaking paradigm was heavily influenced by montage, the creation of meaning through the intersection of images. Montage's free movement was restricted early on by sound, specifically by the use of dialogue. This initially materialised in the limits imposed on movement by the early technical requirements of recording sound. The noise of the camera was reduced by placing it inside a box. However, this made moving the camera difficult. Before the introduction of more sophisticated equipment, actors remained still in order to facilitate a clear sound recording.[37] Average shot length of American film initially doubled with the introduction of sound.[38] The technical demands of early sound production resulted in increased shot length, which resembled both an older mode of production and was associated with theatrical, static storytelling. These resemblances threatened the British field's

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[36] Street, "Special Relationships: Anglo-American screen romance and nationality."
[37] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, pp.298-308
[38] Salt, Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis, p.213

conception of cinema's specificity as a medium. This fear was expressed in the manuals.

Gale argued, 'The sound motion picture camera should be as mobile as the silent one, but the movie maker will face some temptation to limit his shifts in camera viewpoint. This is because the sound equipment is heavier than the silent and must be operated on a tripod. Changing viewpoints is bound to involve more trouble'.[39] After 1931, Hollywood's average shot length dropped as the Moviola system was introduced, and, 'most [Hollywood] directors were taking some advantage of the ease of making a larger number of cuts within a scene in the middle 'thirties'.[40] While American practice appears to have addressed this technical difficulty during the transition years, the lack of movement resulting from sound production remained a serious concern of British manual writers into the late 1930s. However, the average shot length of British films between 1933-39 remained at 8 seconds, less then their US counterparts, perhaps indicating the influence of Russian technique, but still slower than silent production.[41] This may have been a result of poor equipment. Equally, the speed required for quota production could lead to such time-saving, if static, temptations. Gale noted, 'Camera positions should be varied, sequences should be planned and the film must be pictorially interesting. The translation of the theme into motion picture terms is still important, and, in short, an understanding continuity treatment still makes the picture'.[42] The institutionalisation of sound technology and the resultant demands on shot length was an issue in other national cinemas. Salt demonstrates that European films were able to bring the average shot length down to 12 seconds between 1934-1939 (and was considerably less in some individual cases).[43] Like the classical Hollywood system, which relied on narrative as one of its prime values, British manuals placed a greater emphasis on the preparation of the script and preproduction planning following the introduction of sound.

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[39] Gale, How to Write a Movie, pp.150-151
[40] Salt, Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis, p.214
[41] Ibid., p.216
[42] Gale, How to Write a Movie, p.150
[43] Salt, Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis, pp.215-216

However, the introduction of sound threatened a number of already-constituted values held by those in the British field. British manuals attempted to negotiate these values with the new technology by delineating new principles of use in accordance with their existing paradigm. While classical Hollywood assimilated sound, British cinema approached the deployment of this technology with unease. Debates over the value and utilisation of sound were still prevalent in Britain ten years after the first commercial talkie. It is worth quoting Buchanan at length:

> We have even dared to question the value of dialogue, and to ask whether it should form an integral part of motion pictures. That led us right away back to the basic principles of film – the narrating of stories by means of moving images, which is a very different thing to allowing dialogue to tell the story. There is one view, logical up to a point, that progress has resulted in the silent film evolving into a talking film, and that the former is quite dead, but this is not so, for the silent film is not only alive but forms the foundations upon which the talking film builds itself. Such a treatment tends to force the images to play second fiddle, the size of that fiddle being immediately apparent when a talking picture is viewed in its silent form – characters gaily mouthing words to explain a situation that is impossible to understand. Thus a formula has been established which, very strictly speaking, has diverted the film from its natural path, and, attractive and smooth though the modern talking picture is, it quite definitely tends to retard the progress of the film which depends solely upon moving images.[44]

Buchanan's statement illustrates the absolute primacy of the moving image as cinema's defining characteristic for the British screenwriting field. Anything which interrupts the narrating of stories by the moving image is disruptive and, according to Buchanan, 'not true Cinema.'[45] The manuals' attempt to form a distinct theory and practice of screenwriting for sound was varied. In some cases, it amounted to a rejection of the technology; in others, a reworking of classical Hollywood's sound values to establish a 'fit' with those held by British cinema. While an institutionalised use of sound began to emerge in line with the norms of classical Hollywood in some of the manuals, others attempted to establish an alternative set of acoustic values from those propounded by classical Hollywood's assimilated theory of the technology.

The threat to the British concept of cinema was not sound specifically, but dialogue. Dialogue supported character, and character was classical

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[44] Buchanan, Film Making, p.181
[45] Buchanan, Films, p.68

Hollywood's narrative cornerstone. Its introduction allowed Hollywood screenwriters to explore psychological realism in their characters to a greater extent. American Frances Marion stated that, 'Dialogue, as well as action, is a means for the display of emotion'.[46] This insight further supported the cause-and-effect chain of motivated action through which classical Hollywood constructed its narratives. However, the core value held by many in British screenwriting was theme, not character. The film's theme – its argument, its *raison d'être* according to Rotha – was expressed through the combination and clash of visual images.[47] While character was important, theme and story were seen as the key to cinematic storytelling. The introduction of dialogue shifted the focus of narrative composition from theme to character, and the classical Hollywood mode of production it represented. Further, it threatened the field's conceptualisation of cinema as a discrete medium of visual storytelling. As early as 1929, Jackson advised that, 'Even if a story be intended for production as a "talking picture", it must still appeal to the eye'.[48] The use of dialogue demanded a greater continuity of time and place onscreen to give characters space in which to talk to each other. This relative stasis supported classical Hollywood's spatial and temporal continuity, but negated the free movement between visual images valued by British screenwriting and expressed as montage theory. Rotha's advice on creating meaning focused on the length of shot. He noted that,

> this method assumes individual acting to be of secondary importance; primary consideration being given to achieving effect by image montage. Where acting is the only means of conveying the mood of a scene, a shot may be held on the screen for a considerable length of time, thus becoming akin to the stage. This, of course, is the predominant characteristic of the dialogue film, where image lengths are controlled by speech.[49]

The rhythm and movement created through montage was valued more highly than other considerations, including acting. Dialogue changed that. The effects of this slower cutting was expressed in the British manuals, which legitimately feared that visual storytelling as understood in montage would be usurped by a

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[46] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, p.117
[47] Paul Rotha, The Film Till Now, A Survey of the Cinema (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), p.247
[48] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.8
[49] Rotha, The Film Till Now, p.261

static, dialogue-based 'telling' of the story. Brunel gives an example: 'People in life sit down and talk, and in life this may be interesting – or not; but in a film it is uninteresting, for it is boring pictorially even if the dialogue is amusing'.[50] Such a scene does not rely on visual storytelling, but rather it conveys information through dialogue. Buchanan notes that, '*Actions speak louder than words* – no sentence expressing so concisely the urgent need for the filmmaker to concentrate upon creating moving images which, by the order in which they appear, shall tell the story, strengthened rather than weakened by the absence of dialogue'.[51] Both of these examples demonstrate the attempt by British manuals to establish an alternative hierarchy of sound values. Buchanan's advice places montage at the centre of his conceptualisation of cinematic storytelling, Brunel the visual more generally. The addition of dialogue was valued and elevated as progress by the doxic discourses emanating from classical Hollywood. While dialogue might have a place, its utilisation was problematic and supplanted visual with aural storytelling.

The American field also addressed this problem when developing dialogue and editing technique, but the later raft of British manuals appears to represent British dissatisfaction with contemporary screenwriting practice. The British manuals did attempt to define how dialogue should operate within the British value of story unity. Gale stated, 'dialog must bear its share of work in the exposition of the plot and it never can become purely decorative in its function'.[52] The notion that dialogue must work to add to the existing visual storytelling was repeatedly specified. Jackson noted that dialogue can be used in, 'amplifying the actions, giving reason for them, excusing them, inviting them. Thus even those effects which appeal to the ear have movement for their basis in the good screen story'.[53] These manuals attempt to bring the value of dialogue into line with the British hierarchy of story values: unity and movement. Margrave's American influenced manual defines a theory of practice in which dialogue is used to support the values of unity, progression and continuity. Unlike some of the other British manuals, he feels that by 1937, 'we have

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[50] Brunel, Film Production, p.10
[51] Buchanan, Film Making, p.179
[52] Gale, How to Write a Movie, p.166
[53] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.9

reached the point when picture and dialogue music and effect can be welded into something as complete as an organism'.[54] This register echoes Hollywood's technical discourses which used a biological analogy to ease the integration of sound recording.[55] German critic Rudolf Arnheim concurred, theorising that the sound film is not composed of sound supported by visual or *vice versa*, but rather, 'a homogenous creation of word and picture which cannot be split into parts that have any meaning separately'.[56] Such technique utilised both visual and acoustic resources in tandem.

Margrave illustrates how dialogue can be used to create progression and audience expectation: 'The first five spoken words in *The Ghost Goes West* are, "What are we waiting for?" These first five words are progressive. They indicate that something unusual is to happen. They arouse expectation'.[57] This use of dialogue is not decorative; rather it amplifies the action which is to come. It supports the classical Hollywood tenet of causality by creating an expectation which is to be fulfilled, thus beginning a causal chain. Margrave demonstrates how dialogue can be used to illustrate character effectively: 'When Murdoch exclaims, "Father, I don't like America," we have an example of perfect dialogue. From an early part of the film we have been looking forward to what an ancient Scottish ghost would think of modern America. Here is the answer in the fewest possible words'.[58] This use of dialogue supports the classical narrative tenet of economy: an answer in the fewest possible words which reveals character, and enables narrative progression. The question posed in the mind of the audience – 'what does the Ghost think of America?' – is strongly closed in this dialogue. Margrave's example does illustrate how this instance of dialogue supports the character-centred value of story which supports classical Hollywood. However, its deployment as a unified, closed, economical story resource also supports the classical narrative story values held in Britain.

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[54] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, pp.17-18
[55] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.301
[56] Rudolf Arnheim, Film, trans. L.M. Sieveking and Ian F.D. Morrow (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), p.202. Writing in the English language introduction, Rotha describes Arnheim's book as coming, 'at a time when the cinema, both as an art and as an industry has arrived at a critical moment'.
[57] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.18
[58] Ibid., p.19

Both American and British manuals attempted to define a hierarchy of dialogue usage which was linked to adding narrative value. Writing in the appendix to Brunel's *Film Production*, Gerald Elliott described the key dialogue values as, 'Naturalness, simplicity, brevity and speed'.[59] These values fit with the British narrative values of realism, economy and unity. Margrave's advice stresses the value of economy: 'Dialogue when not progressive should be highly dramatic or highly humorous'.[60] The primary value was narrative progression, followed by drama or humour. This conception of dialogue as a function of narrative values displaced the transitional technique which utilised dialogue as a form of spectacle unrelated to storytelling values. Notice how closely Margrave's advice is echoed in Frances Marion's manual: 'I think it was August Thomas who said, "A line must advance the story, develop character or get a laugh. If it does any one of these things, it is a good line; if it does two of these things, it is a fine line; if it does all three, it is a great line"'.[61] Both sets of advice stress the need for dialogue utility – it must add to the narrative in order to justify its inclusion. Gale stresses that, 'successful writers of dialog study and restudy every utterance of their characters'.[62] Such advice illustrates the need for the screenwriter to adopt a careful and well-planned use of dialogue in order to compliment narrative values. Both British and American manuals propose a sound technique in which the use of dialogue is subservient to the narrative in the hierarchy of story values. This advice created a distinctly cinematic dialogue technique, in which acoustic storytelling was a function of visual storytelling.

The use of dialogue appeared to threaten the British screenwriting field because of its association with theatre. Before the introduction of sound, the British field, and particularly British screenwriting, had emphasised cinema's visual storytelling as a means of distinction and legitimation. Buchanan summarises this problem, 'the dialogue film not only loses its greatest power, but, in the process, assumes a shape which is but a necessarily inferior imitation of the stage, from which it should steer clear'.[63] The rush of writers from the

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[59] Brunel, Film Production, p.151
[60] Margrave, Successful Film Writing, p.18
[61] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, p.116
[62] Gale, How to Write a Movie, p.167
[63] Buchanan, Films, p.172

theatre during the transition years occurred in Britain as well as in the USA. British producers also had a predilection for adapting literary and stage works for the screen. Brunel notes that, 'At the end of 1929 a definite improvement was beginning; the dawn of a new art had come with the realisation that noise was not enough…Then suddenly, some time about 1930, talking films shed their theatrical shackles, the film director was called back and we began to have "the pictures" again"'.[64] However, the technique of these early productions was not always adapted for the visual storytelling of cinema, and as a result, the early 1930s saw a number of static, staged productions. Fawcett describes the advantages of screenwriting as, 'much easier than play-writing, because the action can be swung about much more and given wider scope'.[65] However, the freedom of movement was not utilised by writers versed in theatrical writing. Frances Marion defined the problem:

> Dialogue that is effective in a stage play may not be so in a photoplay. The stage play is adapted to the limitations imposed by the walls of the stage. Speech is its most important form of expression and if the lines are good they will carry a play even though it may be deficient in action. The stage uses speech for its own sake, but the screen cannot do so without giving the effect of artificiality. The 'conversation piece' has no place on the screen.[66]

The privileging of acoustic over visual storytelling was one difficulty emanating from the theatrical associations with dialogue. The introduction of dialogue undermined the field's attempt to establish a medium-specific form of literary production distinct from theatre and the novel. While British literary heritage remained a source of story material to be plundered, the visual reckoning of the story allowed British screenwriting to establish a unique mode of visual story practice. The economic capital of Hollywood allowed American screenwriting to overcome this association, as 'legitimate' writers moved west following the Wall Street Crash. However, British cinema had neither the economic capital of Hollywood, nor the cultural capital of the literary tradition.

The final value which dialogue undermined was the British conception of cinema as a uniquely international medium. Classical Hollywood quickly

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[64] Brunel, Film Craft, p.viii-ix.
[65] Fawcett, Writing for the Films, p.65
[66] Marion, How to Write and Sell Film Stories, p.118

negotiated the potential loss of profit: 'The problem of providing foreign-language versions was also quickly solved, with dubbing and subtitling becoming standard by the end of 1931'.[67] However, many in British cinema mourned its passing: 'The silent film could be easily understood in all parts of the world – from Bath to Bermuda – but that is no longer so. We were very near to perfecting a marvellous medium of international expression, but dialogue nationalised it'.[68] Sexton notes that the British highbrow, alternative film culture (of which Brunel and Buchanan were leading lights) rejected the dominant nationalist discourses which placed film as an extension of middlebrow theatre and literature.[69] Rather, they valued cinema's international appeal as central to the medium's specificity. Sound, and specifically dialogue, challenged this value. Looking to the future, Brunel foresaw, 'two types of film, both cinematic – the national and the international…the greatest development will be in the international film, the picture with a minimum of dialogue, or perhaps no dialogue, for even that is possible, though I think the minimum-dialogue picture, with music, is the international picture of the future'.[70]

Such a compositional paradigm for the 'international' picture supports visual storytelling and internationalism which was valued by British screenwriting as creating a distinct medium. The zeal of such reformers was gently mocked across the Atlantic, as Thorp dismissed the educational drive of the 'montage boys' as leading to small audiences and small profits.[71] Buchanan looked forward to a time when, 'a generation hence, people will not recognize the term "a British film," or an "American," "French," "Russian," or "German" film…for a film will be one of two things, good or bad'.[72] Such labels supported not only notions of parochial nationalism, which the 'intellectuals' in British screenwriting disavowed, but also distinct storytelling paradigms. However, such 'international' pictures never emerged in the form these writers described, while

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[67] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, p.246
[68] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.27
[69] Sexton, "The Film Society," p.291
[70] Brunel, Film Craft, p. ix.
[71] Margaret Farrand Thorp, America at the Movies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), p.65
[72] Buchanan, Films, pp.225-226

Hollywood produced pictures for the international market which negotiated language difficulties via the economic and cultural capital of the product.

Because of their dissatisfaction with the acoustic value system being imposed by classical Hollywood's utilisation of sound, British screenwriting manuals negotiated the introduction of sound by proposing an alternative hierarchy of values, based more closely on the already-constituted paradigm extant in British screenwriting. Both Rotha and Buchanan proposed a distinction between commercial and art cinema divided along the use of sound. Buchanan wrote,

> But immediately a medium of expression becomes a commercial proposition, and develops accordingly, catering as it must for the vast majority, the minority begin to lament the lack of aesthetic values in its productions, the absence of intelligence, or art, rhythm, sincerity, beauty, and most of all, that the majority of people are ignorant of the fact that the productions they enjoy lack all these vital things…It looks, therefore, as if there must be two distinct groups – one intellectual, desiring food for thought, the other, well….[73]

These writers foregrounded movement as the prime value in cinema, as expressed through editing or montage. Influenced by Russian theorists, they saw the introduction of dialogue (as opposed to sound) as a restriction on the freedom of movement between images. These distinctions were made along industrial lines. Rotha described the dialogue film as possessing a, 'novelty and freakishness commercially lucrative to American and British producers,' and so distinguishes between a film and a movie: 'a valuable medium of dramatic expression rather than as a superficial entertainment'.[74] The different values of the two types of film were explicated by Buchanan in terms of industry, and specifically acoustic terms: 'There are, and presumably always will be, two main categories into which films can be divided – *Dialogue pictures – static, national, related to the stage. Sound films – dynamic, international, treating subjects impossible to convey in any other medium*'.[75] This division between dialogue and sound films attempts to establish an alternative set of acoustic values in British cinema. This negotiation caters for many of the key values present in British cinema – movement, theme, medium specificity. Elinor Glyn commented on the

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[73] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, pp.32-33
[74] Rotha, The Film Till Now, p.360, p.369
[75] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.44 Original emphasis.

divide in the industry between those who think of film in terms of finance, and those who think of film in terms of art, the latter expressing regret about the introduction of the talkies due to their incompatibility with expressionist techniques.[76]

These theorists were influenced by the films and theories of the Russian school of filmmakers. Published in Britain in 1928, in 'The Sound Film. A Statement from the USSR', Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov proposed a manifesto for establishing sound technique.[77] They acknowledged that the first wave of sound films would be 'dangerous' talking pictures, but proposed a contrapuntal use of sound to clash with the visual images in a new and complex form of visual and acoustic montage. Such a use would maintain the international and visual nature of cinema. Pudovkin argued against a naturalistic interplay of sound and image, as established in the continuity-based paradigm of classical Hollywood: 'Only by this method can we find a new and richer form than available in the silent film. Unity of sound and image is realised by an interplay of meanings which results, as we shall presently show, in a more exact rendering of nature than its superficial copying'.[78] Brunel states that during the silent film days, editing was the 'supreme art', but that sound had relegated it to the work of a 'mere hack'.[79] However, Brunel notes signs that the sound editor is beginning to discover the tricks and devices which would once again place editing as the prime artistic value in cinema. Barr notes that Hitchcock's experimentation with sound and editing in *Blackmail* – best illustrated in the knife scene – helped to reconcile contemporary critics to the possibilities of artistic sound use.[80] Pudovkin argues that such technical expertise must be rediscovered with the realms of the new technology, 'There is a great difference between the technical development of sound and its development as a means of *expression*. The expressive achievements of sound still lie far behind its technical possibilities'.[81] This advice suggests dissatisfaction with the acoustic norms established by

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[76] Elinor Glyn, "Speech at Claridge's Hotel - 'The Possibilities of Expanding the British Film Industry'", March 28 193(?), Box 5, Elinor Glyn Collection, The University of Reading, Reading
[77] Sergei Eisenstein, V.I. Pudovkin and Grigori Alexandrov, "The Sound Film. A Statement from the USSR," Close Up October (1928): pp.10-13
[78] Pudovkin, Film Technique, p.156
[79] Brunel, Film Craft, p.112
[80] Charles Barr, English Hitchcock (Moffat: Cameron Books, 1999), pp.78-97
[81] Pudovkin, Film Technique, p.155

classical Hollywood during the transition years. Arnheim proposed that, 'speech in sound film will be much more effective if used as a part of nature instead of as an art form. Film speech will have to be more lifelike in the same degree as the film picture is more like nature than the stage picture'.[82] Clearly the norms of sound usage had not been established beyond challenge and to universal satisfaction. Indeed, Rotha and Buchanan, influenced by the Russian theorists, proposed the establishment of new acoustic norms which would push the technical possibilities of sound production to the betterment of alternative story values.

Central to this was a rejection of the utilisation of dialogue as advancing the moving picture. Rotha notes that, 'Aesthetically, dialogue is in direct opposition to the medium, unless pure sound as distinct from the human voice is utilised from an expressionist point of view.[83] This discourse echoes the values of expressionism, montage and movement advocated by the Russian theorists. Buchanan argued for the establishment of a parallel cinema with alternative values, with movement the central value: 'there is no reason why, side by side with such talking pictures, we should not also create moving pictures, and learn to make the distinction remembering that moving pictures can rarely be talking pictures'.[84] The value of movement was privileged over dialogue. Buchanan did offer advice on dialogue, but rejected dialogue as a means of supporting character: 'If voices be introduced, use them indirectly – expressing thoughts, as imaginative commentators – uttered by unseen people'.[85] Such a use was offered as a possible dialogue technique which would not disrupt the movement of montage. Such a usage was also advocated by Gale, who proposed the narrative talkie as only one of a range of possible deployments for sound in film.[86]

However, by the mid-1930s sound had helped to cement classical Hollywood's organisation of narrative, time and space as the dominant international screenwriting paradigm. The acoustic values promoted by the alternative film culture became marginalised due to the institutionalised use of

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[82] Arnheim, Film, p.213
[83] Rotha, The Film Till Now, p.245
[84] Buchanan, The Art of Film Production, p.29
[85] Buchanan, Film Making, p.184
[86] Gale, How to Write a Movie, p.116

sound and dialogue in practice. In the latter half of the decade, both Buchanan and Brunel published manuals in which they directed their advice on the 'alternative' use of sound towards amateur film societies. While screenwriting manuals had always been aimed primarily at the amateur market, the intention of the British manuals was to teach screenwriting technique to enable the amateur to 'break into' the professional market. This was certainly the intention of the American manuals of this period. While Brunel and Buchanan's manuals from the early part of the 1930s both mention amateur film societies, by 1936-1937 they specifically identify the amateur film societies as part of their market. This shift may have been pragmatically exploiting a niche, but it was couched in ideological terms. Amateur film societies were still producing silent films due to the prohibitive costs of sound production. Because of this, Buchanan notes, the amateur, 'possesses something which even the professional cannot purchase – freedom'.[87] This freedom is gained by stepping out of the field which is dominated by the economic logic of classical Hollywood. With the financial imperative removed – amateur films were a hobby rather than an exercise in profit - the manuals encouraged the filmmakers to reject the doxic principles of professional production: 'it is up to the amateur to adopt entirely new methods of picture-making, instead of trying to copy British professionals who have failed by trying to copy Hollywood'.[88] Buchanan and Brunel articulate a different hierarchy of production, with Hollywood production a formulaic machine, and British production a shadow of Hollywood. The amateur societies, freed from the restrictions of profit, 'can afford to experiment and show us the way to better things. Personally, I would recommend a bold policy'.[89] These manuals invert the usual relationship, and call for the amateurs to innovate in such a way that professionals might follow in the future. Both link the decline in originality to the coming of sound. As sound production supported classical Hollywood production, the visual innovation of continental, and particularly Russian production was overwhelmed by its economic logic. Buchanan demands that, 'the talking picture must be transformed into a sound picture constructed on silent technique; and this the amateur can practise with advantage, both to

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[87] Buchanan, Film Making, p.12
[88] Ibid., p.177
[89] Brunel, Film Production, p.5

himself and the industry'.[90] Such a technique represents the primacy of visual storytelling, and a dissatisfaction with the institutionalised use of sound within the film industry, which Buchanan felt amateur innovation might address. Brunel's manual provided the clarion call: 'the time has now come for the leaders of the amateur-film societies to make a bold and definite stand for variety and originality'.[91]

Writing in a series for *Home Movies and Home Talkies* magazine, Brunel defines the important values on which the amateur filmmaker should focus. He urges more diligent editing, and reducing redundant footage to promote more economical storytelling. The prime value is movement, but he denies that the amateur, 'should slavishly follow the quick tempo of well-cut American pictures…nor do I say that we should indiscriminately emulate what is called Russian montage'.[92] Rather, he advocates concentrating on movement and tempo. His practical advice is for editors to work a little at a time, 'until you feel you have extracted every foot of extraneous matter'.[93] Such advice is grounded in the classical narrative tenet of economy. He also exercises this value in his compositional advice, which encourages the writer to avoid redundancy, and maximise each narrative resource: 'If your script has two dozen characters, see if you can tell your story as well with twelve'.[94] The amateur film movement represented a locus to support the narrative values undermined by the coming of sound. However, classical Hollywood's particular understanding of sound usage continued to dominate professional practice.

The British screenwriting manuals addressed the complexities of integrating sound as a new technology during the 1930s. While classical Hollywood produced a unified system of sound practice, the British manuals' response to the technology and to the American construction of use was diverse. While a number of themes, practices and values are identifiable in the British response, the identification of a unified British practice is problematic. The negotiation of

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[90] Buchanan, Film Making, p.185
[91] Brunel, Film Production, p.26
[92] Adrian Brunel, "Cut and Save Waste! A Chat on Editing," Home Movies & Home Talkies July 1934: p.53
[93] Ibid.
[94] Brunel, "Ambition! A Pitfall in Production," p.483

these competing demands raises questions of commercialism versus art, of high versus low culture.

The key point about the transition period is that classical Hollywood's utilisation of sound is a construction which supports its filmmaking paradigm. This construction is exposed by the British manuals, particularly by Buchanan, Rotha and Brunel, who proposed an alternative set of sound practices, based on a different filmmaking paradigm. Hollywood's transition was managed through its discourses which quickly established doxic principles of sound practice which supported the existing filmmaking paradigm. These principles were assimilated into practice, which combined to give the illusion of a natural set of practices. The proposal of alternative practices were anti-doxic, revealing a set of practices defined in distinction to classical Hollywood, and also an understanding of the cultural and economic subjection which the doxa imposed. In order to create notions of distinction, these manual writers adopted high/low cultural discourse, which attempted to distinguish film as art from film as commerce. The specific citing of Russian practice in particular demonstrates a grounding of principles within an alternative filmmaking paradigm.

The negotiation of sound, specifically dialogue practice was linked to questions of cultural legitimacy in reference to theatrical practice. British screenwriting had attempted to forge a distinct specificity as a visual medium of storytelling, with legitimate practices based around storytelling through montage. The late 1920s saw a development in this practice, which was undermined by the introduction of sound production. The initial instinct of producers on both sides of the Atlantic to turn to theatrical practice to utilise the technology undermined British screenwriting's efforts to create a distinct writing form. Despite the strides towards cultural independence during the late 1920s, the coming of sound led to British screenwriting suffering yet again from a double-edged inferiority complex: economically inferior to Hollywood, culturally inferior to literature. Hollywood production had the economic and cultural capital to dismiss similar concerns, and tended to incorporate literary production through its economic muscle.

While classical Hollywood's discourses assimilated sound to support its specific narrative functions, the number of British manuals published during the

mid-1930s suggests dissatisfaction with the techniques established in practice. Theme and movement remained the primary narrative values. Movement was threatened by the technical limitations of sound recording, and the time and space requirements of character conversation. Dialogue supported character-motivated narratives as the primary compositional paradigm, rather than theme. In the face of this onrushing tide of cultural and economic subordination, it is little wonder that some manuals proposed alternative acoustic practices based upon an indigenous hierarchy of cinematic and narrative values. However, while such manifestos could be produced in the theoretical discourses of screenwriting manuals, the implementation of such practices was limited by the industrial realities of film production in 1930s Britain. The relationship between theory and practice is examined in the following chapter, which charts the trajectory of screenwriter, manual writer and director Adrian Brunel from his avant-garde silent days through the transition to sound, and into the 1930s. Brunel's career provides a concrete example of how theoretical and industrial practices were negotiated at an individual level throughout this period.

Chapter 8: Knowing the Rules: Adrian Brunel, Screenwriting Manuals and the British Transition to Sound

> Books such as this are vitally important, for without rules as a basis, there would be no form in our pictures, they would proceed haltingly, spasmodically and confusingly. The great innovators in the arts generally knew all the rules, kept those they needed, and then deliberately broke those rules they felt hampered their path of expression.[1]
>
> Adrian Brunel

Adrian Brunel was a British director, producer, manual author and screenwriter during the 1920s and 1930s. A founding member of The Film Society and a prolific author, Brunel also ran, with Ivor Montagu, a company which re-edited 'sick' films to improve the final cut during the 1920s. He found early success during this decade, writing and directing a number of burlesque films and longer features. The coming of sound was a major turning point in Brunel's career. Compounded by a protracted legal case against Gainsborough pictures, Brunel failed to find work during the transition years. During this time, he wrote the first of his instructional manuals on *Film Craft* (1933), later going on to pen *Film Production* (1936) and *Film Script* (1948). He found work again after 1933, working for a time on quota films. Although he wrote and directed commercial productions from the mid-1930s, he never enjoyed the same success as his early silent days. Michael Balcon described Brunel as a 'man of great worth who never reached any of the peaks'.[2]

Through his various filmmaking guises – writer, director, script doctor, manual writer – Brunel demonstrated a keen awareness of the arbitrary construction of cinema's story and representational codes. His career traces a shifting engagement with these codes, reflecting a complex negotiation between his personal hierarchy of cinematic values, and the changing realities of working within an increasingly industrialised field. As a practitioner he worked within the challenges the field faced – the quota system, the star system, sound, and the shadow cast over British production by Hollywood – while his manuals provide

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[1] Adrian Brunel, "Book Review: Oswell Blakeston, How to Script", nd., Box 11 Item 1, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London

[2] Michael Balcon, Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime in Film (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p.26

an insight into a developing theory of practice which addressed these challenges. By charting the trajectory of Brunel's work in theory and practice, an insight might be garnered into how these representational codes established standards of practice and notions of quality, particularly regarding the use of sound, within British screenwriting, while at the same time assessing the impact the institutionalisation of these industrial forms had on an individual's career. This will be illustrated by a close examination of two script examples: the silent film *The Vortex* (1928), directed by Brunel with a script by Eliot Stannard from Noël Coward's play; and the sound film *The Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1937), directed by Hans Schawarz, script by Brunel, Arthur Wimperis and Lajos Biro from Baroness Orczy's novel. These two scripts illustrate Brunel's negotiation with the changing codes and constructions of practice in British cinema. Sexton and Gledhill have investigated the early part of Brunel's career, focussing on his 'highbrow' and 'alternative' production in the 1920s.[3] However, these two films were commercial propositions: *The Vortex* an adaptation of Noël Coward's hit play and a star vehicle for Ivor Novello; and *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* a high-budget sequel for Alexander Korda's London Film Productions, and they were composed within the paradigm of mainstream cinematic values either side of the sound revolution.

By examining the development of these scripts, the emergence of a storytelling technique can be identified. This technique engages with the conditions of production, the appropriate 'rules' which govern the form, while representing Brunel's personal system of storytelling values. These values reached a watershed as the coming of sound intensified the struggle to establish rules which governed the form of cinema in Britain. The 'rules of sound' not only determined the deployment of acoustic resources, but also supported the value system which fundamentally determined the form cinema would take. This system of use – the 'rules of sound' – is a construction which impacts on all other aspects of cinema's form. While this chapter focuses on the impact of

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[3] Jamie Sexton, "Parody on the Fringes: Adrian Brunel, Minority Film Culture and the Art of Deconstruction," in eds. Alan Burton and Laraine Porter, Pimple, Pranks and Pratfalls' British Film Comedy Before 1930 (Trowbridge: Flick Books, 2000), Christine Gledhill, "Wit and the Literate Image: The Adrian Brunel/A A Milne Collaborations," in eds. Alan Burton and Laraine Porter, 'Pimple, Pranks and Pratfalls', British Film Comedy Before 1930 (Trowbridge: Flick Books, 2000)

sound on an individual's career, it also addresses Brunel's changing understanding of all cinema's representational and storytelling codes. The coming of sound did not only influence the use of acoustic resources. What was at stake was the future of cinema itself.

Brunel showed a hyper-awareness of the need to understand and master the codified norms of screenwriting from the early days of his career. He read a number of screenwriting manuals on entering the film business in order to teach himself 'technique'.[4] Of particular interest was William Archer's seminal *Play-Making*. Brunel kept a series of Archer's maxims in a small notebook in which he personally reviewed a number of different manuals.[5] While rejecting some advice as dated and unhelpful, Brunel describes Archer's book as, 'far and away the most useful book on the subject. One is impressed to such a degree as to regard the author's work as law'.[6] Archer's manual was based explicitly in an Aristotelian conception of classical narrative, and includes maxims (which Brunel recorded in his notebook) such as, 'the characters should control the plot, not the plot the characters,' and, 'ask yourself, "Is there sufficient obstacle between my two lovers?"'.[7] This manifested in Brunel's early recognition of the importance of the screenwriter. In 1919, Brunel wrote: 'The scenario must be a living thing and the scenario-writer must be a creative artist who can visualise the action of his characters…Until the scenario-writer's share in the production is properly appreciated, we shall not attract the services of literary artists we need'.[8] Under this conception, the screenwriter is an artist and the profession carries the same cultural capital as other literary production, as they must specify the visual on the page. The weight Brunel attached to understanding the 'rules' of film construction were underlined when he set-up his Mirror Films in 1916 with school friend Harry Fowler Mear. He notes that, 'While we were preparing our first story, we took a course in scenario writing at a "school" that claimed to teach you everything. We soon came to the conclusion that they could not teach

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[4] Brunel, Nice Work, p.20
[5] Archer, Play-Making
[6] Adrian Brunel, "Notebook", c.1912, Box 161 Item 4, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[7] Adrian Brunel, "Small notebook", nd., Box 87, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[8] Adrian Brunel, "Script Values - The Importance of a Detailed Scenario", 1919, Box 12 Item 1, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London

us any more than I had got from my little text book'.[9] From this early period, understanding the rules which governed cinematic storytelling was important to Brunel. However, he was already making distinctions between the rules and theorists he liked and embraced (Archer), and those he rejected (other manuals, the 'school'). His inclination to move freely between sets of rules illustrates his understanding of the arbitrary authority of any one set over another.

The 1920s represented Adrian Brunel's most productive and creative period. This creative impulse was founded on the interrogation of established film codes. In 1920 he directed *The Bump*, made with Leslie Howard and A.A. Milne for their company Minerva Films. Brunel also made a series of burlesque comedies. These included *Crossing the Great Sagrada* (1924) – a spoof of an expedition film – and *Pathetic Gazette* (1924), a satire of newsreel films. He then made five further low-budget burlesque comedies for Gainsborough Pictures, each with a production cost of £150: *Battling Bruisers, The Blunderland of Big Game, So This is Jollygood, Cut It Out* and *A Typical Budget*.[10] These films, composed of a third inter-titles, a third stock footage, and a third original material, drew attention to prevalent story and filmmaking constructs within British cinema. Sexton notes that, 'Brunel – in his burlesque films – operates as a debunker of master codes and narratives, especially those seen in some way as oppressive'.[11]

Gledhill's shot-by-shot analysis of *The Bump* highlights Brunel's use of inter-titles to draw attention to the process of storytelling as a concept distinct from the seamless and invisible continuity of classical Hollywood.[12] Brunel's methodology illustrates the influence of classical Hollywood's master code (so established a story paradigm by 1920 as to warrant parody), and alternative British values based on literariness, story, and vaudeville traditions. Further, this series of burlesque films satirises stereotypical story themes such as nationalism, imperialism, censorship and Hollywood production. However, the main thrust of their attack is on restrictive and prescriptive rules which had become associated

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[9] Brunel, Nice Work, p.34 Mear went on to become one of the most prolific British screenwriters of the 1930s, churning out formulaic quota-quickies for Julius Hagen's Twickenham Films.
[10] Ibid., p.109, Sexton, "Parody on the Fringes," p.91
[11] Sexton, "Parody on the Fringes," p.91
[12] Gledhill, "Wit and the Literate Image"

with authority. The burlesques serve to deconstruct dominant cinematic forms as much as they deconstruct the films' content. This interrogation of cinematic codes was doubtless encouraged by the limited budget Brunel had at his disposal, in what he referred to as his 'experiments in ultra-cheap cinematography'.[13] Indeed, Brunel shot *Battling Bruisers* - a film of 70 shots and 1,700 feet of film - in one day. Frugality was his aim: writing to Balcon, Brunel noted, 'This is not the contemplative method of the masters of comedy, but think of the money we save!'.[14] While cost was an issue, these films also supported British alternative film culture's suspicion of mainstream cinema's formulaic approaches to filmmaking.

In his earliest screenwriting manual, *Film Craft*, Brunel espouses a kind of 'story' which moves away from the classical narrative or classical Hollywood conceptions of storytelling. He gives examples of documentary films, whose style readers may wish to try to emulate, including Ruttmann's *Berlin* (1927) and Flaherty's *Moana* (1926). Both films apply a different system of values to that of classical Hollywood. There is a foregrounding of space and time in *Berlin*, a picture which follows the day of the city. Indeed, the subtitle 'Symphony of a Big City' highlights the musical, and non-visual aspects of the film. In many ways, the compositional drive was more musical than dramatic. The film examines Berlin as an organism, rather than following the dramatic path of any individual – the basis of classical Hollywood composition. Even though some of the 'documentary' is staged, there is a greater emphasis placed on realism than on causality. Such impulses were valued by many in British alternative film culture. A mixture of documentary and fiction cinematic styles was proposed by Buchanan and others. Brunel advocated creating a documentary - or at least a more 'realist' - style of cinema, which fits into these broader discourses.

Brunel was a founder member of The Film Society, whose aim was to encourage engagement and discussion of the art and technique of film.[15] By drawing attention to the fabricated construction of different representational codes – Brunel parodied British film, classical Hollywood and German

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[13] Brunel, "Experiments in Ultra-Cheap Cinematography," 43-46
[14] Adrian Brunel, "Letter to Michael Balcon", November 14 1924, Box 112 Item 2, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[15] Sexton, "Parody on the Fringes," p.90

Expressionism – he offers an escape from such formulaic production, and exposes the arbitrary construction of the value system which makes distinctions between such industrial forms. By exposing such representational codes in the burlesques, Brunel breaks the classical Hollywood tenet of invisible storytelling, which is achieved through a focus on continuity and easy comprehension based upon the techniques of classical *decoupage*. By exposing the narrative construction, and through advocating a documentary style, Brunel moves away from the classical Hollywood notions of 'showing', to forms of public 'telling', where both producer and viewer acknowledge themselves, each other, and the artifice of the medium, while entering into a storytelling system more akin to a 'dialogue'. Gledhill describes this storytelling technique as prevalent in British film production during the 1920s: 'Telling is a public act, performed equally in the printed book and oral tale. Telling is a public form of exchange between author as storyteller who may be historical figures or fictional characters, relaying print or oral tales – and a receiving audience'.[16] Such techniques accommodate other storytelling impulses within the cinema – Gledhill argues that they are more 'literary' – although they are also grounded in the traditions of the music hall and vaudeville. By revealing the constructs of cinema's various storytelling techniques, these burlesques exposed as transparent the hierarchy of values which supported them. The production of the burlesques, and his association with The Film Society lead some to label Brunel as 'highbrow'. Brunel was later forced to resign from The Film Society for fears that his association with it would be damaging to his commercial production.[17] He denied the 'highbrow' charge in 1933, claiming to be 'older and wiser'[18]. His concern was with what he perceived as the restrictive constructions of cinematic storytelling:

> Though we constantly hear that the scope of the cinema is almost unlimited, it is not generally realised how many restrictions there are…For the most part, these restrictions are supposed to be dictated by an alleged distaste of the

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[16] Gledhill, "Wit and the Literate Image," p.157
[17] Brunel, Nice Work, p.114
[18] Brunel, Film Craft, p.70

> public, for instance, costume films are said to be unpopular with the public [Frankly, I do not believe this].[19]

Brunel was concerned that the rigid adherence to narrative organisation such as the happy-ending would lead to film writing becoming a kind of mechanical formula.[20] It also shows how doxic principles are established as 'natural' by those who control the field, and Brunel's understanding of such constructs.

The editorial removal of his heterodoxic statement highlights how strains of resistance can be removed from the field's discourses. Sexton notes that Brunel's continual exposing of codes and conventions draws attention to the fact that all cinema is a construction.[21] However, Brunel does not deny the legitimacy of these conventions, stating, 'I believe in pictures. That is my faith. I don't mind whose pictures'.[22] Such an attitude served him well, as cinema's machinery quickly assimilated Brunel's divergent practices into its industrial forms. Following these burlesques, an American firm made him an offer to work in Hollywood.[23] Brunel stayed in Britain and agreed to make a mainstream commercial film for Michael Balcon's Gainsborough Pictures, his first commercial film since *The Man Without Desire* in 1924. His chameleon-like ability to assume a number of different roles allowed Brunel to survive the uncertainties of working within the British film industry. It is a reflection of his innate understanding of the requirements of disparate elements within the field. He could move from 'highbrow', alternative film production to directing a mainstream star-based adaptation because he grasped the hierarchy of values at play within the different locations of the field. His hyper-sensitivity to these constructs and how they operated in practice facilitated his free movement between different paradigms of production.

The production of *The Vortex* faced difficulties from the beginning. Stannard's original treatment was written specifically to overcome potential censorship difficulties, but the censorship considerations, coupled with the

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[19] Adrian Brunel, "Wanted - A Cinema-Goer's League. Too Many Happy Endings," The Daily Sketch November 14 1929 in The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London. Box 11 Item 3. Brunel's original comments in the square brackets were cut in the publication by the Editor.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Sexton, "Parody on the Fringes," p.95 fn
[22] "'F.W' Article Creates Stir," Film Weekly June 24 1929: p.6
[23] Brunel, "Experiments in Ultra-Cheap Cinematography," p.44

requirements of adapting the story from stage to screen lead were problematic.[24] Ivor Novello's appearance as Nicky added British star value, but his performance of ambiguous sexuality added unforeseen complications to the character's relationship with his mother. Brunel later complained about the story, stating that as the subject was ill-suited to a screen adaptation, he had to focus on utilising his 'technique' to try to save the film: 'technically it was the best thing I had done, for I had put all I knew into the job in the attempt to save it. But I just couldn't save it – or rather Technique couldn't save an impossible proposition, though it covered up many of the blemishes in the emasculated story, and the film was not an utter flop'.[25] He acknowledged the difficulty in 1931, stressing, 'the importance of building the technique of the talking film on that of silent film and not on that of the stage. (The suggestion was, at the time, dismissed as "high-brow"!)'.[26] This case study provides an insight into Brunel's understanding of technique – the rules which govern the formal properties of the film – as he felt he had to foreground these qualities to mask the ill-suited story. Brunel made the best job of it he could: 'I thought out some little twists, some intriguing camera angles, some effective close-ups, some unexpected shots. It was just an extra coating of sugar for the doughnut – to make up for the lack of jam in its centre'.[27] The script notes illustrate the technique and values utilised during the development of *The Vortex*.

The *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* provides a comparison in the deployment of sound technique, particularly as director Hans Schwartz needed tactful guidance from Brunel as associate producer.[28] Brunel believed that the talkie could be successful but it, 'must be allowed to be visual. We must not overcrowd it with talk. The appeal of the silent film was a great commercial and emotional factor, which we cannot afford to lose. We must still be cinematic'.[29] The means by which he achieves this sense of the cinematic is through the techniques based on his understanding of storytelling rules and constructs. From

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[24] Eliot Stannard, "Film Treatment of 'The Vortex'", nd., Box 158 Item 4, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[25] Brunel, Film Script, p.129
[26] Adrian Brunel, "Stage Play Treatment," Kinematograph Weekly April 23 1931: p.59
[27] Brunel, Nice Work, p.133
[28] Low, Film Making in 1930s Britain, p.222
[29] "'F.W' Article Creates Stir," p.6

their first appearance, Brunel believed that the talkies could be positive for the British film industry, as their competitors did not hold the same advantage in developing a sound technique, as Hollywood had in the silents after the end of the First World War. He foresaw the talkies as an opportunity for British filmmakers to profit, through the development of a technique of sound usage, and what he saw as the exploitation of England's natural advantage of recording English voices on screen.[30] *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* illustrates such a technique. While *The Vortex* was a silent production, Brunel's notes demonstrate the changing balance of creative input between the director and the screenwriter which occurred during the transition period. Brunel was a writer as well as a director, and recognised the importance of a clear script from which to work. He noted that, 'there is a theory that shooting "off the cuff" should result in an appearance of spontaneity, but in practice it just doesn't, and in any case, film is far too expensive a medium for this sort of thing'.[31] Rather, Brunel understood filmmaking to be planned activity with rules which, if adhered to, would produce a film replicating the values of its constructive paradigm. By comparing the development of these two scripts, Brunel's hierarchy of cinematic values can be examined by exploring the technique he utilises to express these them. By comparing a silent and a sound production, Brunel's negotiation of this technology can be examined.

Classical Hollywood narrative composition was based on the development of character, while British manuals advocated beginning with theme. One of the difficulties faced in the adaptation of *The Vortex* was incorporating Ivor Novello's starring role, which necessitated a shift in narrative focus from the mother (in the original play) to Novello's character Nicky. This reorganisation required extended discussion on developing character and characterisation during script development. Stannard noted that, 'the softening of the mother from shameless libertine to a frivolous conceited butterfly, so far from robbing the film of strength, will, on the contrary, centre the interest more directly on to the son who is the lead and will enable us to get much more

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[30] Ibid. p.6
[31] Brunel, Film Script, p.70

comedy into the screen version'.[32] Following Archer's maxim, and the central tenet of classical Hollywood composition, much of the initial adaptive work dealt with character development as a means of shifting the narrative focus to Nicky. Screenwriter and story editor Angus MacPhail wrote a memo on the treatment, noting that its chief defect was in the characterisation. He argued that while on stage it was possible to have more nuanced characterisation, on screen characters should be either strong or weak, less they become 'ineffective' onscreen. MacPhail noted that distilling and reorganising character traits would, 'necessitate certain alterations in the action'.[33] The relationship between character and action is demonstrated in these notes. Brunel's memo outlines his technique of addressing these difficulties:

> The first thing I would do in translating this play for the screen would be to collect and collate all the evidence of character and idiosyncrasy in the dramatis personae, which are so well drawn. In this way their characters would clearly govern the action of the play, as well as further and inevitable development of their own personalities on the screen.[34]

Brunel's technique clearly follows a classical Hollywood narrative organisation centred on character-motivated causal action. This was almost certainly an appropriate deployment of story resources for a mainstream commercial film, utilising Novello's star persona. Brunel illustrates how these clearly defined character traits will drive the narrative: 'When his mother needs saving, the heroic streak in him comes out – to save her he must save himself and he is ready to make any sacrifice to save her'.[35] Notice the clearly defined goal (his mother needs saving) and obstacle to achieving that goal (himself). The narrative is thus organised around Nicky's efforts to overcome a series of obstacles in order to achieve his goal, the epitome of classical Hollywood narrative organisation. Nicky's motivation for acting is based on psychological traits manifested as personal desires. However, expressing characterisation was problematic due to the censorship and time restrictions inherent in adapting story material from

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[32] Stannard, "Film Treatment of 'The Vortex'"
[33] Angus MacPhail, "Memo: Stannard's Treatment of 'The Vortex'", nd., Box 158 Item 3, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[34] Adrian Brunel, "Material Relating to 'The Vortex'", nd., Box 43 Item 4, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[35] Ibid.

stage to screen. This regard for specific characterisation is illustrated in the use of titles. Brunel noted of one title, 'This is not in character for Nicky. Good for Tom. Something quite straightforward'.[36] There is a clear distinction between each character's speech as the titles are illustrative of defined traits.

While censorship and star issues necessitated that much of the compositional work focussed on character, Brunel was also concerned with the illustration of the film's theme, a central concern to British screenwriting during this period. Brunel wondered, 'since the title was chosen to represent the theme, if we cannot illustrate the meaning of the word photographically in the manner of Ruttmann or Murphy (cf. 'Metropolis' and 'The Love of Sunya'). An imaginative photographic prelude is often intriguing and an effective illustration of the theme'.[37] Such an illustration was done in the opening scene, where Brunel commented, 'I always prefer to begin a sequence with an intriguing close-up…open on tiny hammers hitting the wire strings of the instrument'.[38] Stannard's treatment of the opening scene is of Nicky writing and playing a new musical composition. However, Brunel's technique to convey this narrative information uses a montage of shots, particularly close-ups, to highlight the thematic value of Nicky's descent into a vortex of despair. However, there was a clear understanding of the purpose and use of such a technique based on the dramatic requirements of the story. Brunel notes, 'This over-use of close-ups may kill the real purpose of necessary close-ups, which is to punch home a vital point'.[39] By using close-ups in the opening, he attempts to highlight the thematic issues at stake. It also demonstrates Brunel's use in practice of both classical Hollywood's compositional value of character-centred narrative organisation, and British screenwriting's value of a thematic approach through techniques inspired by Russian montage. Indeed, Brunel was willing to 'borrow' technique from other practitioners, noting: 'All the Lubitichian possibilities of this shot needs a few close-ups'.[40] Brunel's technique in writing the opening of *Return of*

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[36] Adrian Brunel, "Notes on 'The Vortex' Titles - in AB's hand", nd., Box 158 Item 3, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[37] Adrian Brunel, "Memo to Balcon - 'The Vortex', notes on Mr. Stannard's Treatment", nd., Box 158 Item 4, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[38] Brunel, "Material Relating to 'The Vortex'"
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

the Scarlet Pimpernel also illustrates the film's thematic value: a cricket match illustrates a particular conception of cinematic 'Englishness' – described by Higson as central to the 'heritage' film.[41] Such a theme looked to exploit the transatlantic success of London Film Productions' previous efforts, most notably *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) and *The Ghost Goes West* (1935). The cricket match symbolises a form of swashbuckling English fair play, a theme which runs throughout the film.

The management of transitions was important in the development of both scripts, primarily as a means of achieving narrative continuity, but also as a means of enriching the narrative and cinematic experience. The emphasis on continuity was a cornerstone of classical Hollywood storytelling, and designed to guide the audience to the salient narrative points from moment to moment.[42] The construction of the narrative in both these films strives to achieve such continuity, particularly when managing audience comprehension in potentially disorientating transitions in time and space. However, Brunel also wanted the transitions to do more. On a transition in *The Vortex*, he noted:

> Between these two shots, rather than a mix through from one to the other, I should prefer some other continuity advice. We have had close-ups of hands playing music, so for a change, cannot we have close-ups of a stage dancer's feet, dissolving through to Anna's feet, unless we can think of something better. In this sort of thing one often gets inspiration on the set, but in the meantime I would like to see the necessary marked in the script itself.[43]

The transition between locations is managed through the focus on the feet. By maintaining the hands and feet motif, Brunel creates a stable style within the diegesis of the film. Close-up cutting was used in the opening sequence foreshadowing the 'vortex' theme of the film. In *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel*, a similar visual device is used in the first transition in location between Brighton and France. A cricket scorecard is imposed, with the names and scores of the English players. This dissolves into a list of names of French traitors due for execution. This technique manages the transition elegantly, and provides contrast in the traits between the gentlemanly English fair-play, and the treasonous and terrorised French. The script also makes use of dialogue hooking throughout in

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[41] Higson, Waving the Flag, p.26
[42] Thompson, Storytelling in the New Hollywood, p.10
[43] Brunel, "Material Relating to 'The Vortex'"

order to manage location transitions. The change from France back to Brighton is signalled in the final dialogue exchange of the previous scene:

THERESA:
Where can I find him?

CHAVELIN:
I'll tell you where. In England there's a town called Brighton.

FADE IN
LONG SHOT
THERESA singing in the Royal Pavilion.[44]

The dialogue manages audience comprehensions through a potentially disorientating change in narrative time and location. This indicates a stable and developed technique of dialogue use by 1937, which compliments the visual transition continuity utilised before the coming of sound. Brunel did not specify this type of dialogue hooking in his manuals of the 1930s, but does draw attention to it in *Film Script*, published in 1948:

> Comprehension is often aided by the closing words of the previous scene – such as, 'Good – I can just catch him at the office'. The next scene is clearly the office and is confirmed when we see 'him' there or hear a clerk say that he has gone. Failing such a continuity direction from the dialogue, we might have to resort to a continuity device, such as a name plate outside the office building or the character's name on his office door.[45]

This advice supports the classical Hollywood value of continuity, but relegates visual storytelling techniques (conveying narrative information through the name plate) as secondary to the acoustic technique of dialogue hooking, while in practice he utilised both. In *Film Script*, Brunel places a high value on continuity as a quality and as a screenwriting technique. He states that, 'good continuity is that quality in a script where the action is smooth and easy flowing, and there are no accidental jolts to one's attention or to the moods the film is intended to create in its audience'.[46] Indeed, continuity was a prime value in *The Vortex* and in *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel*. Both commercial propositions, Brunel uses this

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[44] Lajos Biro, Adrian Brunel and Arthur Wimperis, "Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel", 1937, Script Collection, The British Film Institute, London
[45] Brunel, Film Script, p.105
[46] Ibid., pp.87-88

type of transition continuity to ensure the audience can follow the flow of the narrative. While such advice did not appear in his earlier manuals, its appearance in *Film Script* illustrates the extent to which continuity had become institutionalised as a prime storytelling value within British cinema by this time.

Brunel used a similar technique to manage transitions in time in *The Vortex*. Title 14 bridged a spatial change as well as a temporal lapse. The original title read, 'Probably his tailor was the first man to discover that Nicky was in love'. While this managed the change in location (from the previous scene to the tailor's shop), it did not indicate the temporal change. Brunel's note read, 'I don't care for this and it isn't helpful as a time- lapse title. Something along these lines – "But how could this purely business relationship last? Anyhow, a few Hampsteads later"'.[47] This title guides the audience through the changes – temporal and spatial - and poses a 'dangling clause' about the nature of the relationship. This question will not be resolved until later on in the narrative, and is a basic tenet of classical Hollywood story progression.[48] He notes that this type of transition: 'gives more polish and smoothness' to the shots. Such notes indicate an understanding of these storytelling techniques, and an ability to use them in a coherent filmmaking style. While Brunel revelled in exposing such codes and conventions in his burlesque films during the 1920s, he was willing and able to base his mainstream commercial output within the constructions of established storytelling norms. His use of sound techniques, particularly dialogue hooking demonstrates the development of a stable storytelling style based on classical Hollywood norms supporting values of narrative clarity and continuity. However, in both films, the thematic qualities of the narrative were also exploited, indicating a technique which incorporates both Hollywood and British values.

In both films, Brunel's technique produces a sense of unity and a strong sense of internal closure. These values were important in both US and British practice. In *The Vortex*, he delineates a use of intertitles which manages spatial transitions while creating a sense of continuity and internal unity within the diegesis of the film. He calls for,

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[47] Brunel, "Notes on 'The Vortex' Titles - in AB's hand"
[48] Thompson, Storytelling in the New Hollywood, p.12

a recurring formula for the continuity titles here in the early part of the film – which we may revert to later on, if we like, also. I can only suggest something very sketchy and rather inaccurate at the moment – but for instance –

PARIS – THE HOME OF LIGHT MUSIC
PARIS – THE HOME OF BRIGHT FROCKS
PARIS – THE HOME OF NIGHT LIFE

and so on. And later on –

LONDON – THE HOME OF - [49]

These titles manage the spatial and temporal changes in location, as well as provide expositionary information about the narrative world into which the characters are moving. Such a sense of unity is achieved in *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* through the use of the cricket motif. A unified and closed sense of ending is achieved at the climax, after Sir Percy has captured Chauvelin, the antagonist:

PERCY:
What punishment do you think Mr. Chauvelin should have my dear? A slow lingering torture do you think?

MARGURETTE:
Yes darling. You could teach him to play…

MS CHAUVELIN – …cricket.[50]

The cricket motif bookends the action, bringing the theme to a close; the triumph of the English qualities associated with cricket overcome the negative qualities of the French despotism. The opening cricket scene also acts as exposition, delineating Percy's character, and his athletic prowess. The fielder 'catching' Percy foreshadows his capture in France, while Margurette's comments highlight the stakes of such a capture. Such exposition is unmotivated action, simply a means of relaying information. As such, it falls short of classical Hollywood's economic storytelling demands. However, as part of a unifying technique, it is made to 'work' harder than straightforward exposition. It also illustrates the thematic value of the film. Like the opening of *The Vortex*, where the theme was developed through the use of montage as representative of a moral descent into a

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[49] Brunel, "Material Relating to 'The Vortex'"
[50] Biro, Brunel and Wimperis, "Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel"

'vortex of despair', the opening of *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* establishes an internal patriotic conflict of values which are at stake throughout the film.

In *The Vortex*, Brunel attempted to improve on the economy of the storytelling, and illustrate the British cinematic value of movement. In sequence 100, he notes: 'Needs breaking into shots. There are other places in the sequence that need similar attention. And the whole sequence wants cutting in half'.[51] Movement was a key value in British screenwriting discourses during this period, and cutting between shots represented one conceptualisation of such movement. Brunel's concern in this sequence is that the camera remained too static for too long. There was a fear that such stasis was overly theatrical, particularly for a film adapted from the stage, and it did not utilise the expressive capabilities of the cinema. The second point, emphasised in underline, is the desire for economical storytelling. Brunel's later advice on economy echoed his attitude on practice: 'To include half-a-foot of bad film, or unnecessary film, or redundant pictures, is to waste much of the good material you have'.[52] However, Stannard did not agree, citing the qualities of the sequence: 'Don't cut this sequence without great thought – it is charming comedy well played and shows Nicky to be boyish and modest and parent-loving. I am awfully disappointed that you find it drags – I thought we were safe here for laughs and sympathy between our lovers'.[53] Stannard cites the development of Nicky – the central protagonist's – character in this sequence, as well as the comedic values. However, *The Bioscope* described the film as, 'another proof that the most successful stage plays is not necessarily a fit subject for the screen', questioning in particular the central scene between Nicky and Florence which had to be toned down to meet with censorship regulations.[54] *Kinematograph Weekly* also comments on the unsuitability of this play for adaptation, resulting in action which was, 'necessarily slow'. Brunel's difficulty appears to lie in the lack of motivated action during the central sequences, the main tenet of classical Hollywood storytelling practice. Cost was another factor to be considered in the production of *The Vortex*. Several scenes were exterior shots set in Paris, but Brunel noted

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[51] Brunel, "Material Relating to 'The Vortex'"
[52] Brunel, "Cut and Save Waste!," p.53
[53] Brunel, "Material Relating to 'The Vortex'"
[54] "The Vortex," The Bioscope March 29 1928: p.54

that they, 'can come right out. We cannot afford to take Ivor Novello to Paris'. Instead, Brunel utilised the technique garnered in his ultra-cheap experiments to illustrate the narrative point without the cost: '[shots] 133-134 Paris to London tickets – Bunty's hands and Nicky's – and the ring. [shots] 143-146 Opening ticket book and tearing out leaf'.[55] This instance illustrates technique which combines the demands of continuity and narrative progression within financial limitations. It allows story elements to be easily conveyed within the restrictions faced.

Kinematograph Weekly praised Brunel's direction of *The Vortex* for, 'one or two well-handled dramatic moments; he has managed to bring out the two leading characters well. The mother's jealous rage makes a sound climax, and is directed with ability'.[56] These comments illustrate the successful mix of classical narrative and classical Hollywood techniques, emphasising the importance of story construction, a strong climax, and character motivated action. *Kinematograph Weekly* was critical of *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel's* lack of star quality, but praised the 'flair for advancing narration with regard to popular romantic sentiment'.[57] The unsuitability of the story material for adaptation was a continuing theme in British cinematic discourses, which Brunel acknowledged, and attempted to overcome by applying a combination of classical Hollywood and British story and filmmaking norms to the project. While not an overwhelming critical or public success, Brunel's ability to apply these different story values to the script and production demonstrates his understanding of these constructs in theory and in practice, and his willingness to apply a different hierarchy of values when warranted.

Brunel followed *The Vortex* by making *The Crooked Billet* in 1929, which he described as his best film to date.[58] However, the sound revolution came, and Gainsborough studios closed, like the rest of the British industry, while it was rewiring to accommodate the new technology. While Brunel's contract had expired, it had specified that he was to direct three films during the year, not the two he had completed. As he was paid on a per picture basis, Brunel

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[55] Brunel, "Material Relating to 'The Vortex'"
[56] "The Vortex," Kinematograph Weekly March 29 1928: p.54
[57] "Reviews for Showmen," Kinematograph Weekly October 28 1937: p.29
[58] Brunel, Nice Work, p.153

sued Gainsborough Pictures for monies owed. This action was not successful, and resulted in disrupting Brunel's reputation within the industry. Indeed, Arrar Jackson warned against such an action: 'I would most strongly urge that British authors do nothing so silly as to suspect a Scenario Editor of being a rogue, for not only will they be suffering from delusions, but they will also close the doors of Producing Companies against them forever'.[59] The doors did remain closed to Brunel, and many others working within the industry during the transition to sound production. Gilliat recalls the transition to sound: 'Strangely it was spoken about as a theoretical subject rather than a practical one. Nobody really considered, in a level-headed way, how it was going to affect their job'.[60] It was not just a theoretical subject, but affected the lives of workers in a real and often damaging way. It is little wonder that a strain of antagonism and anti-Hollywood sentiment emerged from the discourses of British screenwriting and other filmmaking texts following the move to sound production. Brunel noted:

> I resent American electrical interest smashing the art of silent film. The film-makers of the period were just beginning to evolve a new art; they had gone far and there were signs of rapid development. Anything might have happened. All that is certain is that restful silent drama was stabbed in the back.[61]

Brunel identifies clear industrial/artistic divide, with economic interests driving the transition to sound. Brunel's adaptability was evident and necessary following the transition to sound, as he could not find work. By the early 1930s, his situation remained bleak: 'As I still could not get a job as a director and there were no editing jobs going, I turned my hand to script writing…I decided to direct "quickies", if I could'.[62]

By 1933, Brunel was able to secure regular work writing and directing quota-quickies, primarily for producer George Smith. He adapted his storytelling paradigm to the necessities of quota production. He stated that, 'gradually there evolved a technique of production which avoided finesse, risky experiments and

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[59] Jackson, Writing for the Screen, p.132
[60] Kevin Macdonald, "The Early Life of a Screenwriter II - Sidney Gilliat interviewed by Kevin Macdonald," in eds. John Boorman and Walter Donohue, Projections 2, A Forum for Film-Makers (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), p.124
[61] Brunel, Nice Work, p.165
[62] Ibid. p.165

subtle touches; treatments were straightforward and simplified'.[63] This technique provided some success. The story for *Follow the Lady* (1933) was described as drawing on, 'well tried and tested devices for its humour and situations, but the evergreen quality of the entertainment is admirably preserved by the players'.[64] *Little Napoleon* (1933) was praised for its, 'Simple, appealing story, popular romance, quaint humour, and good characterisation, direction and staging'.[65] *The Picturegoer* was less generous with Brunel's quota efforts, describing the story of *A Taxi to Paradise* (1933) as, 'a machine-made affair and introduces all the conventionalities of the sex drama, including the kindly policeman who helps the erring woman'.[66] Similarly, *The Laughter of Fools* (1933) had, 'a Cinderella theme in a very slight story with obvious humour and tame romantic qualities. The dialogue is weak and tends to hold up the action'.[67] While these films may have suffered from a mixed critical reaction, the quota market did provide Brunel with regular work. Brunel felt it was a positive period: 'I learned a lot and was rather pleased with myself, for I believed that we were evolving a technique that showed what could be done facing fearful odds'.[68] A new technique of producing quota films emerged from the chaos of production. Richard Norton and Anthony Havelock-Allen were producing quota pictures for Paramount, and, 'had a theory that given the same treatment as big pictures, the subjects could be made well. I do not know if they were able to make any money on these quickies, but I do know that they were, for their modesty, in many cases, excellent'.[69] Despite the obvious constraints, Brunel adapted his storytelling technique to accommodate the conditions of the field, and found a positive and repeatable technique for achieving success.

Brunel was able to take his experiences making these quota films as illustrations of good practice in his manuals. He illustrates how he created the illusion of several location changes by writing simple background directions, and thus conserve costs. The first example comes from his scenario for *I'm an*

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[63] Ibid., p.166
[64] "Follow the Lady," Kinematograph Weekly June 29 1933: p.17
[65] "Little Napoleon," Kinematograph Weekly July 17 1933: p.17
[66] "A Taxi to Paradise," The Picturegoer April 1 1933: p.1
[67] "The Laughter of Fools," The Picturegoer January 20 1934: p.27
[68] Brunel, Nice Work, p.171
[69] John Paddy Carstairs, Honest Injun! A Light Hearted Autobiography (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1942), p.133

Explosive. There are six different locations specified, and Brunel differentiates each by including a small detail, such as a French telephone, or a tapestry. He notes, 'the details and dialogue do not concern us now, but what does concern us is that these backgrounds were actually as bare as my description of them, and what was behind the artists was sufficient to give an impression of their location'.[70] Like the 'French' scenes from *The Vortex*, Brunel utilises the conventions of continuity and cinematic storytelling to illustrate narrative points through a cost-effective technique.

While in practice Brunel demonstrated a flexible technique which drew on elements from different storytelling paradigms to accommodate the particular circumstances of production, his manuals show greater resistance to classical Hollywood story techniques. During his five-year hiatus from working, Brunel wrote the first of his three screenwriting manuals, *Film Craft*, published in 1933, *Film Production* was published in 1936, and *Film Script* in 1948. He described writing these manuals as, 'labours of love'.[71] In these books, he charts an evolving conceptualisation of sound usage. *Film Craft* was written during the transition years, and its advice is cautious in the use and application of sound; Brunel provides a pragmatic rejection of sound in cinema as being dangerously theatrical and un-cinematic. By the publication of *Film Production*, Hollywood had established their acoustic values and British production was negotiating these principles, as seen in practice in the development of *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel*. In both of these manuals, Brunel proposes an alternative set of acoustic values for British screenwriters, which foreground movement as essentially cinematic, and relegates dialogue as essentially uncinematic. By the time *Film Script* was published in 1948, Brunel's advice on sound follows the doxic principles of classical Hollywood. By this stage, a stable technique of sound usage had been established in Britain. Classical Hollywood's deployment of sound directly supports its industrial and story paradigm. Having previously rejected sound in film as being uncinematic, and too closely dependant on static theatrical technique, Brunel locates his advice on using sound within cultural capital of the literary production. While the uncertainties of working within the

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[70] Brunel, Film Production, pp.79-80
[71] Brunel, Nice Work, p.185

British film industry may have forced Brunel to adapt his story paradigm in practice, the manuals chart his changing system of cinematic values during the institutionalisation of a number of industrial forms. Sound use is of particular interest, not only as a resource with which the filmmaker may tell their story, but also as a component whose use implicitly supports a certain hierarchy of values. As a filmmaker attuned to film's constructed nature, Brunel's advice on sound illustrates the practical negotiation of sound as a filmmaking resource, and the theoretical negotiation of different story paradigms as the technology was becoming institutionalised within British production.

By 1948, there was no question that dialogue was among the primary utilisation of sound usage. Brunel's devotes a chapter to dialogue in *Film Script*, where he outlines his theory of practice. Unlike his previous manuals, Brunel locates the use of dialogue in film within a literary context. He states that the, 'difference between the dialogue of the playwright and the screen writer, it is not really so great as some screen writers claim. The screen writer's is probably tauter'.[72] He uses literary figures to illustrate this screenwriting advice: like Dickens, the writer should '"vocalise" every speech you write'; and like Wilde, punctuation can be used to, 'help your reader to understand and to speak the lines as you wish'.[73] Brunel emphasised this theatrical quality in his advice on closing lines which should have, 'finality about them, and, if possible, they should have the quality we associate with the theatrical phrase "a good curtain"'.[74] This rhetoric signals an ideological retreat to the sanctity of literary production's cultural capital. The association locates screenwriting as a legitimate writing form that is distinctly British and different from classical Hollywood. Brunel's advice in *Film Script* continues to offer structural advice distinct from classical Hollywood's three-act structure. He espouses the sequence as the primary narrative division, even going so far as to provide a graphic analysis of treatment quality divided into five sequences.[75] The value of movement – so prized by many during the 1930s – is replaced in Brunel's manual by continuity, tempo

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[72] Brunel, Film Script, p.98
[73] Ibid., pp.97-100
[74] Ibid., p.105
[75] Ibid., p.109

and originality.[76] This is different from classical Hollywood's narrative based on motivational causality, and centred on character.

However, while some values are recognisably British, the institutionalisation of sound as a means of supporting character is implicit in much of Brunel's advice on dialogue. This is the basis for classical Hollywood's sound use. He states that, 'the characterisation of your dialogue is vital – if you want your characters to be vital'.[77] Further, 'character is mainly expressed through dialogue. You may describe clothes, tone of voice, bearing and mannerisms of the persons in your story, but the spoken work can belie all these things'.[78] This advice illustrates how the classical Hollywood values had became institutionalised during the 1930s to such an extent that values of visual storytelling which Brunel was so vociferously defending fifteen years earlier had been replaced by institutional use of dialogue as a key means of storytelling. The creation of meaning through the clash of montage images has been replaced by advice on how to utilise dialogue hooking to aid continuity. While Brunel and others had proposed the clash of images as cinema's primary storytelling value in the 1930s, classical Hollywood's continuity rules were ingrained in practice by the publication of *Film Script*. However, having gone to such lengths to establish continuity as a notion of quality in theory and in practice, Brunel reveals the arbitrary construction of such a rule:

> I have suggested this as a rule for you, but like all rules, it can be broken if there is a good reason for doing so. Having enunciated so many of such rules, which some younger technicians have taken as gospel, I have sometimes been rather startled at the shocked opposition when I myself have broken these rules – with a purpose.[79]

Such heterodoxic advice demonstrates Brunel's willingness to challenge the accepted norms of screenwriting practice. Rather than accepting such rules as unbreakable, Brunel's own manuals and advice incorporate a number of different screenwriting paradigms, without elevating one as superior to the rest. Rather than unthinkingly accepting one paradigm as superior to others, Brunel's theory

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[76] Ibid., p.37
[77] Ibid., p.99
[78] Ibid., p.100
[79] Ibid., p.90

and practice demonstrates a technique based on purpose. His belief – his faith – is in films, and this precipitates a willingness to adapt his storytelling technique as appropriate for each script. This flexible attitude towards story constructs is revealed in his review of American Tamar Lane's screenwriting manual. Brunel's margin notes indicate that he agrees with Lane that, 'No comprehensive treatise on the photoplay has been published since the inauguration of the talking picture'[80]. However, he does not concur with all his advice. Brunel's manuscript for his review states, 'You may not agree with all that the author, Mr. Tamar Lane, recommends – and frankly I do not – but he has so much valuable information which he bestows liberally and he obviously knows his job, that the book should be possessed, underlined and marked in the margins with your objections'.[81] Brunel's own review copy is marked with such objections: he describes Lane's description of montage as, 'not quite this'.[82] Such advice demonstrates the negotiation of the rules which determine the form of cinema. Brunel's heterodoxic advice reveals the arbitrary construction of such rules, as articulated through Lane's manual, and the ability of the writer to choose whether to obey them or not. The institutionalisation of classical Hollywood techniques created a stable set of storytelling rules and conventions against which alternative story values and styles could be located. Brunel did conceptualise a difference between British and classical Hollywood storytelling after the Second World War. His review notes on Tamar Lane's *The New Technique of Screen Writing* indicate the distinctions he drew between British and classical Hollywood production. He created a section entitled, 'Personality of British Films', in which his notes cite *Brief Encounter, In Which We Serve* and *The Gentle Sex* among the type of film which encapsulates such qualities.[83]

In setting out his own rules of practice, Brunel consistently cites and utilises techniques from existing paradigms. However, he does not slavishly adhere to the demands of Russian montage, or Hollywood classicism, but rather

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[80] Adrian Brunel, "Review notes in Tamar Lane, The New Technique of Screen Writing", nd, 16607/4-16607/6, The Bill Douglas Centre for the History of Film and Popular Culture, The University of Exeter, Exeter, p.v

[81] Adrian Brunel, "Book Review: Tamar Lane, The New Technique of Screen Writing", nd., Box 11 Item 1, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London

[82] Brunel, "Review notes in Tamar Lane, The New Technique of Screen Writing", p.77

[83] Ibid.

examines them as a possible means of story composition. Such an approach demystifies the doxic or inevitable associations each story paradigm had established. As early as 1933, he sought to break down the mystique of certain terms: '*Montage* has become an almost international word, with a new significance in England…let it therefore be kept for describing the Editor's work where he has created a little sequence out of nothing – nothing but of shots arranged in rhythmic and dramatic cross-cutting'.[84] During the transition years, Brunel certainly located his advice within the value of movement demonstrated by montage. However, his advice also broke down the doxic constructs governed by certain rules:

> I do not say that we should slavishly imitate the quick tempo of well-cut American pictures; in the majority of cases the American method of quick cutting is the most effective, although I have known it to be applied to subjects that were not designed for such treatment, with rather tragic results. Nor do I say that we should indiscriminately emulate what is called the Russian method. Editors sometimes amuse themselves with a spot of Russian *montage*, which is in effect just a spot of bother to a confused audience who are not amused. Such experiments should be kept for the private amusement of technicians, unless there is a legitimate reason and a definite call for the application of such methods in the story.[85]

This advice foregrounds the importance of story and the requirements of the individual composition over the formal requirements of storytelling rules. Brunel's advice, like his work in practice, demonstrates an awareness of the arbitrary construction of storytelling paradigms, while adopting a pragmatic approach to utilising existing structures in order to locate each particular film story. Some values continued to recur throughout this period, in particular the value of movement. While the restrictions of early sound recording technology pushed Brunel towards a story paradigm more aligned with the techniques of Russian montage, by the mid-1930s, he had distanced himself from the strictures of any one paradigm, and revelled in advising writers to utilise the whatever elements they required. By the time *Film Script* was published, the technical limitations of sound had been long overcome, and the value of continuity was well established. His advice offered aspirant screenwriters the tools with which to use sound effectively, and brought his theory into line with the doxic classical

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[84] Brunel, Film Craft, p.93
[85] Brunel, "Cut and Save Waste!," p.53

Hollywood principles of sound use. However, while his later advice on sound was firmly within institutionalised practice, he still demonstrated a willingness to challenge and adapt existing story paradigms in other areas.

Brunel's career could be summarised as one of 'amnesia and schizophrenia', which Barr claims is so indicative of British film history.[86] His career began as a debunker of master codes, but he went on to make films grounded in the technique of classical Hollywood production. His early manuals strenuously opposed the introduction of dialogue as theatrical and uncinematic; but twenty years later in *Film Script* he proposes a system of use based firmly on the classical Hollywood conception of dialogue, and legitimised by a discourse grounded in the literary and theatrical tradition. He was a 'high brow', who wrote quota quickies; a member of the British filmmaking establishment, who sued a British studio; a breaker of rules who wrote three manuals to explain the rules to others. He is difficult to pin-down, which is symptomatic of his approach to screenwriting and story composition. Throughout his career, Brunel demonstrated a hyper-awareness of cinema's codes and conventions, and the artificiality of their construction. His hierarchy of values placed film at the top, an attitude which caused some to label him as avant-garde, but which allowed him to move between story paradigms and cinematic techniques in order to best serve film story.

The British manuals were forced to address the challenges which sound technology presented in the industry. These were not simply technical challenges, but ideological ones; challenges to the very notions of what constituted cinema. These battles were not just played out in theory, or in abstracted debates, but affected the lives and careers of real people. The coming of sound negated the further development of silent technique, and caused Brunel personal hardship. Yet, even from the early transition years, he insisted on a system of sound use based on cinematic principles, not theatrical ones. While his alternative system of use was not taken up, his later manual illustrated an acoustic technique based on the same silent principles which were essentially cinematic: visual storytelling, continuity through transition, sound as a narrative

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[86] Barr, "Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia"

resource which served the story – a means of demonstrating characterisation, of progressing the narrative. His storytelling technique in practice maintained the value of economy. In *The Vortex* and *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel*, narrative resources are made to work. Transitions aid continuity *and* create a sense of unity. Dialogue acts as exposition *and* foreshadows narrative events. Intertitles bridge temporal *and* spatial gaps. Throughout his work, Brunel remained committed to the value of British cinema. He admired Russian, German and Hollywood practices, but conceived a system of use which incorporated the best of existing paradigms to serve a British technique. His manuals and other writings encouraged others to understand the constructs of cinema, garner experience and produce films of originality. His burlesques have qualities of parody and self-awareness that seems essentially British. Even his work within the studios, such as *Pimpernel* retained a patriotic sense of Englishness in the cricket motif. This motif also acted as a narrative strategy which taps into national heritage, while its deployment as a story resources creates exposition, foreshadowing, economy, theme, and unity. He managed to negotiate the changing demands placed on British film production, through his understanding of the construction and conventions of cinematic storytelling.

Conclusions

The outcomes of this thesis are twofold: there are the archaeological findings which shed light on the practice and profession of screenwriting in Britain between the World Wars. This process of dusty rediscovery has - I hope - led to a second and more important outcome. It has exposed as arbitrary the rules of contemporary screenwriting practice which are strongly institutionalised, seemingly ubiquitous and rarely challenged. The formation of the classical Hollywood system meant that these screenwriting norms were always likely to become dominant in American production, but the same was not necessarily true in Britain. While the institutional and technological changes which occurred between 1927-1939 meant that economics was likely to become a determining factor in screenwriting practice, it was not inevitably the case. The British screenwriting field offered a range of alternative values, practices and strategies to the rules of classical Hollywood, often articulating these through the screenwriting manuals. It is these alternative paradigms and the values they represent which are most interesting. They expose the narrative which valorises the inevitable triumph of classical Hollywood's rules as a façade, and reveal the process by which these values are institutionalised. The case study format has enabled me to capture something of the diversity - and divisiveness - of arguments and practices which constituted British screenwriting in the 1930s. Thus, while I have been able to highlight the successes of British screenwriting, particularly how a star formula for a personality like Max Miller was established, there has also been space to explore the way institutional changes devastated the careers of men like Adrian Brunel. The corpus of the dozen or so screenwriting manuals published in this period acted as a definitive object of study, while also enabling a more precise articulation of the relationship between pedagogic theory and actual practice. It is from these discourses that a combination of practices and values – often defined in terms of what they were not – were formed into what might loosely be described as a British screenwriting paradigm.

Unlike the rich monolithic structures of classical Hollywood practice, charting the development of a British screenwriting paradigm has presented practical difficulties. Central to this is the patchy archival record. The scope of

my research questions was always likely to be frustrated by a lack of primary sources. This is endemic of the period, as many companies operating in Britain during this period no longer exist – particularly the smaller production firms – and their records remain lost, destroyed or otherwise unavailable. Finally, the lowly status of the script, and the scriptwriter, has meant that many of the films and personalities of interest were inaccessible to me. While the detail may be lost, hints about the activities of individuals and companies remain in the existing archive. I believe, for example, that the most intriguing figure in 1930s British screenwriting is Harry Fowler Mear, whose name appears in places throughout this thesis. Mear was a prolific screenwriter at Julius Hagen's Twickenham Films. His list of credits during the decade runs into the hundreds. He was reputed to have had an old joke book, which kept him supplied with material in script after script. There is little surviving material on Hagen or his working practices beyond his credit list, and the occasional aside in the biographies of more prominent figures. Even in a work so focussed on the activities of Hagen and Twickenham Productions as Linda Woods' MPhil thesis, Mear's contribution is not examined in detail. This is a pity, as the material which does exist suggests that Mear may have been the British equivalent of someone like Bryan Foy, Warner Brothers 'keeper of the Bs'.[1]

Similarly, the British Screenwriters' Association is a tantalising subject of research, but locating material about its activities has been frustrating. It was formed in 1937, and original members included Launder and Gilliat and Adrian Brunel. It later merged with the Society of Authors, the papers of which are now housed at the British Library. While there is material relating to the Association's correspondence during the 1930s – mainly advising authors on selling the motion picture rights of their published works – the broader activities of the Association appear to be lost. Snippets remain: in the BFI's Brunel Collection are the minutes of a debate between Brunel and Launder in 1939, arguing the proposition, 'A good script is more important than good direction'.[2] While it seems likely that such activities were held in addition to the Association's advisory services, the

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[1] Richard Maltby, Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) p.112

[2] Frank Launder and Adrian Brunel, "Notes Taken on a Debate: "A Good Script is More Important Than Good Direction"", February 8 1939, Box 172, The Brunel Collection, The British Film Institute, London

records remain elusive. The Launder and Brunel debate offers the possibility that such meetings were used as a forum to discuss and forge an understanding of the state of the profession and the field in general. It must be hoped that additional material comes to light in the future.

Our understanding of this period of British cinema is as much a result of the material to which researchers have access, as the material to which they do not. It has taken the academic field some time to move out of the shadow cast by Low's exhaustive history of British cinema. Her dismissal of screenwriting during this period does not account for the variety of debates, practices and values present in British screenwriting during this period, and which this thesis has attempted to highlight. Much of the existing research has been reconstructed through the painstaking reading of trade papers and fan magazines. However, these sources produced a certain kind of history: the trade papers tended to positively portray the distributors' material, while the fan magazines focus, quite naturally, on stars and particularly Hollywood stars. British cinema was quite legitimately seen as a producers' medium and these publications represented it as such. Screenwriters and screenwriting were noticeably less visible in the British trade publications than in their American counterparts. Particularly interesting is John Paddy Carstairs' regular 'London Lowdown' column for the Screen Guilds' Magazine, which was part industry news and part overseas gossip. It showed a thriving community of Hollywood and British writers and filmmakers living, working, and often holidaying together; the London equivalent of the Algonquin round table located at the Savoy Grill. The existence of such a community - broad, diverse, with people coming in from Hollywood or the theatre - where practice was discussed and the medium debated, justifies the conceptualisation of British screenwriting as a field.

I accept that this model has its limitations, not least the researcher's input in selecting and organising the material under discussion. Further, Bourdieu's writing is at times difficult, circular and contradictory. He often says he wants to avoid doing something, and then goes ahead and does it. His prose is purposely obtuse and intractable, which seems to me to be the very definition of 'bad' writing. Other critics have picked holes in his use of terminology, his separation of subjectivity and objectivity, and the politics of his oeuvre. I have tried to avoid

reducing my discussion of British screenwriting as a point between the binary opposition of Hollywood on one hand, and 'legitimate' literary production on the other. The relationship is much more complex than that. However, I have found Bourdieu's writing a particularly useful set of tools for thinking and writing about this area. While this thesis has avoided some of the epistemological debates about Bourdieu's work where such debates were extraneous to my research aims, this is not to say that I have not considered them. However, there is an expanding corpus of Bourdieu criticism which addresses such issues in a more appropriate forum. Rather, I used and defined these concepts in such a way as to provide a clear language and way of conceptualising screenwriting as a field. The advantage of this methodology is to anchor a critical paradigm in evidential research.

By stepping back, and examining how practices and tastes are formed within the field, this approach exposes the overarching myth of Western art: the myth of 'God-given' genius. In his recent book, *This Is Your Brain on Music*, neuroscientist Daniel Levitin argues that it takes a human being a minimum of 10,000 hours of practice to reach world-class performance.[3] Whether it is playing tennis or writing poetry, there is no recorded instance of a person reaching world-class performance with fewer hours of practice. Levitin even addresses instances of child prodigies, such as Mozart. While Mozart was extremely precocious, and composed symphonies as a child, he did not become world-class until he had practiced sufficiently. The field model demonstrates how and why the mythology of talent is promoted.

This viewpoint problematises auteurism as the dominant paradigm of cinematic authorship. Anyone who has visited a film set recognises the difficulty in attributing authorship to the director in such a collaborative medium. Yet, this idea remains dominant in the public and critical understanding of film authorship. A trot through film history illustrates the problem with auteurism: film in the 1930s was understood as a producer's medium. Hitchcock aside, it would be difficult to attribute an authorial 'signature' to a director in British cinema during the 1930s. However, you might know instantly that you were

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[3] Daniel J. Levitin, This Is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession (Atlantic Books, 2007)

watching an Alexander Korda production. This distinction remains true today: you know almost instantly when watching a Jerry Bruckheimer production, but would have trouble recognising the particular director or screenwriter at work. If the authorial 'signature' is the definition of authorship, it is possible to locate the particular tropes and concerns of individual screenwriters. Aaron Sorkin's stories (*A Few Good Men, Sports Night, The West Wing, Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip)* centre on a pair of intelligent, witty, neurotic male friends; Charlie Kaufman (*Being John Malkovich, Adaptation*) allows access to his surrealist worldview. These recurring threads demonstrate that a screenwriter *can* be put forward as the 'author' of a film in some cases, if that is the critical aim. I have some sympathy with the view that it is the director who translates the film into the final product seen onscreen, but it seems to be only one of a number of creative and interpretive roles in production. In the same way it is argued that the director realises the screenplay into the final product, so the editor manipulates footage into a comprehensible final form. Indeed, the editor's role in creating the final product seems to me to be undervalued in both the popular and critical discourses, although several of the British manuals suggested that the best training for an aspirant writer was to start in the cutting room. As such, I do not propose wrestling authorship away from the director in favour of the screenwriter, as such a position seems as arbitrary as the current understanding.

Instead, the field model allows the researcher to ask more interesting questions: not *who* is the author, but *why* do certain practices succeed, why some people are successful when others fail, and why certain rules and practices become lauded and institutionalised as good practice. Such an approach moves away from questions of individual taste – who deserves a place in the auteurist pantheon, and who does not – and instead focuses on broader questions of how and why practice and success are allocated. This is particularly useful when examining screenwriting, which has never had the same level of individual fame or personal mythology enjoyed by other aspects of filmmaking. One must acknowledge screenwriting's own mythology, epitomised by classical Hollywood, expounded in the successes and failures of writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald, and realised in works like *The Day of the Locust* and *Sunset Blvd.* The typical story runs that the filmmaking system offers the writer a Devil's pact:

their talent (and soul) in return for unheralded wealth in Hollywood's sausage factory. There is, as in all myths, an element of truth in this story. A similar sentiment exists in Britain, where the weight of 'legitimate' forms of production looks disapprovingly upon screenwriting. This understanding locates screenwriters as part of the machinery over which they have no control. The field model, with its broad parameters and concept of capital, reveals the make-up of that machinery, how it is constructed, where the individual fits into it, and who controls the pulleys and levers which govern how the machine works. Success in screenwriting is dependant on approval from a number of gatekeepers – script readers, producers, executives – before a screenplay can be realised in its final form. Because of this, and because of the financial investment required to make a film, the establishment of a set of rules is particularly important.

These rules have been strongly codified as the classical Hollywood narrative. By examining the export of these screenwriting codes to Britain through the lens of the field model, two main points are revealed: the rules of classical Hollywood are arbitrary, and no more natural than any other storytelling paradigm; and that they are based on an understanding of filmmaking as an economic enterprise. The exportation of these codifications of the norms and doxic principles illustrates the construction of classical Hollywood's screenwriting principles as an industrial system of use. It also illustrates the distinction – made by Elizabeth Cowie – that the filmmaking norms of classical Hollywood's narrative are different from the Aristotelian conception of drama. While the term 'classical narrative' is used broadly and without distinction in many contemporary pedagogic discourses, the British manuals made such a distinction in the 1930s.

One of my starting points in researching this thesis was a sense of unease at the way contemporary screenwriting pedagogy promotes the classical Hollywood narrative as a natural and inevitable narrative paradigm, common to all humanity and unchanged since Aristotle. Even a brief reading of Aristotle reveals fundamental (and perhaps unsurprising) differences between ancient Greek dramatic principles and those utilised in modern filmmaking. Ubiquitous references by contemporary practitioners seem to indicate that they have either not read Aristotle, or they have failed to understand his writing. Most likely is a

desire to gain legitimation for their manual/course/method through associative cultural capital. However, the comparison between Britain and American manuals in the 1930s shows that alternative British practices and values were promoted and utilised, often referring to Aristotelian dramatic principles as distinct from classical Hollywood norms.

While vestigial elements of these values are still present in contemporary British filmmaking, economic logic eventually overwhelmed these other impulses. The desire to associate classical Hollywood narrative with older, more 'legitimate' forms, and to promote it as a product of the archetypal subconscious *à la* Jung and Vogler is a deliberate misrecognition of the screenplay's fundamental role in maintaining the economic stability of the filmmaking system. As the case study chapters have shown, the story choices offered by the classical Hollywood narrative support its economic system. It was not inevitable that sound technology would be mainly utilised for dialogue. However, dialogue allowed more in-depth characterisation, which supported the star system, the economic lure which classical Hollywood used to attract customers.

Classical Hollywood's arbitrary rules are also revealed by examining the success of other national cinemas. Indian cinema – often lauded as the most successful in the world – follows narrative conventions which can seem almost incomprehensible to Western audiences, with a tendency for lavish and spectacular musical numbers which break narrative unities. I admit to wondering if there is such a thing as a Bollywood screenwriting manual, and where I might acquire one. The vibrant Asian film market places a greater emphasis on movement, dance and spectacle than Western practices. Indeed, these 'inevitable' rules tend to break down on closer examination: whereas manuals used to advocate a three-act structure, manuals today insist on four, five, or more acts. Episodes of television sitcoms are inevitably two-act affairs (with a break for the commercials). Even in Hollywood, there has been an increase in multi-narrative plots, moving away from notions of time and spatial unity and following equally the story of several characters.

Yet there remains a strong sense that there are – and should be – a codified set of narrative techniques which must be mastered in order to participate in the screenwriting field. In part I think this can be explained as a

language of exclusivity: a club for those who know an inciting incident from a plot point. The structures and approaches these manuals advocate are for use in competitive situations. Agents choose one screenplay to promote over other submissions; producers decide which story to back; the countless screenplay contests must make decisions to elevate one screenplay over another. The norms described by screenwriting manuals ensure these ongoing competitions are played by certain rules. Further, the manuals provide a standardised technical language in which to discuss, and improve screenplays. One of the noticeable aspects of British screenwriting in the 1930s is this lack of a standardised language, which can make script editing more difficult. Screenwriting manuals do have an important part to play in contemporary filmmaking, as well as serving as a critical resource when examining the history of screenwriting. The more nuanced approach to screenwriting manuals adopted in this thesis differentiates the interwar British manuals from the monolithic conception of replicating normative practices. Walk into any large bookshop today, and you can find dozens of screenwriting manuals, most peddling a variation of the classical Hollywood narrative. These texts have a place as a starting point for the neophyte writer, as part of the ongoing debates about the evolution of screenwriting practice. My sense is that Hollywood's contemporary output continues to stray further from the norms of unity in favour of spectacle. An aspiring screenwriter could do worse than to read Frances Marion's manual, or Arrar Jackson's, as they both remain as good an exposition of screenwriting tenets as any contemporary publication.

Where does this leave screenwriters? If the rules to which they are told to adhere are arbitrary and self-serving, then what is to be done? First, I would follow the advice given in most of the manuals examined in the period: learn the rules. Understand the terminology, how planting works, what a dialogue hook is, how the three-act structure works in principle. I would also recommend that they understand the basics of the field concept. Even if the writer does not believe in classical Hollywood narrative, it is likely that the people who control the decisions as to whether or not to commission their work do believe in it. The growth in screenwriting manuals, courses and gurus has ensured that script editors, producers, television and film executives have a particular understanding

of story structure, which facilitates selling a particular story idea. However, the growth of digital filmmaking and internet distribution offers screenwriters the possibility of telling the stories that they want to tell, in the way that they want to tell them, in high quality and at low cost. Internet exhibition offers intriguing possibilities to impact on storytelling unities and norms through hyperlinks and other technology. One suspects that Buchanan and Brunel would have approved of the potential for operating outside of the codes of classical Hollywood.

While the rules of the classical Hollywood narrative have become enshrined in British screenwriting, and form the basis for much theoretical, pedagogic and normative screenwriting practice in Britain, the elements of resistance formulated in the 1930s have remained a defiant strain in the screen stories British cinema has continued to tell. Hollywood's stories are conceived to follow the journey of a single protagonist who overcomes obstacles to reach a resolution. I tentatively suggest that such a story paradigm 'fits' into the story and the myth of America, conjuring images of manifest destiny and a land of opportunity, which locates the spirit of the nation in the individual. The stories British cinema has told - and continues to tell - locates the spirit of the nation in the community and the land itself. From the Second World War films capturing the spirit of the Blitz, through the Ealing Comedies, the Carry On films, the kitchen sink dramas, Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, to Shane Meadows and even Wallace and Gromit, British screenwriters have foregrounded the role of society – good or bad – as a vital component of the stories they tell. The roots of this storytelling impulse should be traced to the influence of vaudeville, the social mission of documentary makers, the political intent of the left-wing, and a sense that the stories of British characters are intertwined with the nation itself.

Filmography

A Few Good Men (USA 1992, dir. Rob Reiner sc. Aaron Sorkin)

This Acting Business (GB 1933, dir. John Daumery)

Being John Malkovich (USA 1999, dir. Spike Jonze, sc. Charlie Kaufman)

Berlin (Ger 1927, dir. & sc. Walter Ruttman)

Blackmail (GB 1929, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, sc. Alfred Hitchcock, Benn W. Levy, Charles Bennet, from play by Charles Bennet)

Brief Encounter (GB 1945, dir. David Lean, sc. Noël Coward, David Lean Ronald Neame, Anthony Havelock-Allan, from play by Noël Coward)

The Dark Stairway (GB 1937, dir. Arthur Woods)

Evergreen (GB 1934, dir. Victor Saville, sc. Emlyn Williams, Marjorie Gaffney, from play by Benn W. Levy)

The Ghost Goes West (GB 1935, dir. René Clair, sc. Robert E. Sherwood, scenario Geoffrey Kerr, Lajos Biro, René Clair, based on a story by Eric Keown)

Jurassic Park (USA 1992, dir. Steve Speilberg, sc. Michael Crichton, David Koepp, Malia Scotch Marmo, from novel by Michael Crichton)

Knowing Men (GB 1930, dir. Elinor Glyn, sc. Elinor Glyn, adptn. Edward Knoblock)

Love of Sunya (USA 1927, dir. Albert Parker, sc. Max Marcin, Charles Guernon, adptn. Earle Browne, titles Cosmo Hamilton)

They Made Me a Criminal (USA 1939, dir. Busby Berkeley, sc. Sig Herzig)

Metropolis (Ger 1927, dir. Fritz Lang, sc. Fritz Lang, Thea von Harbou)

Millions Like Us (GB 1943, dir. & sc. Frank Launder, Sidney Gilliat)

Moana (USA 1926, Robert Flaherty, sc. Robert Flaherty, Frances Flaherty)

The Murder of Dr. Harrigan (USA 1935, dir. Frank McDonald, sc. Peter Milne, Sy Bartlett, based on novel by Mignon Eberhart)

The Price of Things (GB 1930, dir. Elinor Glyn, sc. Rhys-Williams, Elinor Glyn)

Private Life of Henry VIII (GB 1933, dir. Alexander Korda, sc. Lajos Biro, Arthur Wimperis)

The Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel (GB 1937, Hans Schwartz, sc. Lajos Biro, Adrian Brunel, Arthur Wimperis, based on the novel by Baroness Orczy)

The Silver Spoon (GB 1934, dir. George King, sc. Brock Williams)

Sing As We Go! (GB 1934, dir. Basil Dean, sc. J.B. Priestley)

Sports Night (TV, USA 1998, creator Aaron Sorkin)

Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip (TV, USA 2006, creator Aaron Sorkin)

Sunset Blvd. (USA 1950, dir. Billy Wilder, sc. Billy Wilder, Charles Brackett, D.M. Marshman Jr.)

Target For Tonight, (GB 1941, dir. & sc. Harry Watt)

The Thirteenth Candle, (GB 1933, dir. John Daumery, sc. Brock Williams)

The Vortex (GB 1927, dir. Adrian Brunel, adptn. & scenario Elito Stannard, titles Roland Pertwee)

The West Wing (TV USA 1999, creator Aaron Sorkin)

Adrian Brunel Filmography

Crossing the Great Sagrada, (GB 1924, dir. Adrian Brunel)

The Bump, (GB 1920, dir. Adrian Brunel, sc. Adrian Brunel & A.A. Milne)

Pathetic Gazette, (GB 1924, dir. Adrian Brunel)

Battling Bruisers, (GB 1925, dir. Adrian Brunel, sc. Adrian Brunel, Edwin Greenwood, J.O.C. Orton)

The Blunderland of Big Game, (GB 1925, dir. Adrian Brunel)

So This Is Jollygood, (GB 1925, dir. Adrian Brunel)

Cut It Out, A Day in the Life of the Censor, (GB 1925, Adrian Brunel)

A Typical Budget, The Only Unreliable Film Review, (GB 1925, dir. Adrian Brunel)

The Man Without Desire, (GB 1922, dir. Adrian Brunel, sc. Frank Fowell, story by Adrian Brunel, based on an idea by Monckton Hoffe)

The Crooked Billet, (GB 1929, dir. Adrian Brunel)

Follow the Lady, (GB 1933, dir. & sc. Adrian Brunel)

The Laughter of Fools, (GB 1933, dir. & sc. Adrian Brunel, original play H.F. Maltby)

Little Napoleon, (GB 1933, dir. & sc. Adrian Brunel, original story Marshall Reade)

A Taxi To Paradise, (GB 1933, dir. & sc. Adrian Brunel, original play Graham Hope)

Max Miller Filmography

Gaumont-British

The Good Companions (1933, dir. Victor Saville, sc. Ian Dalrymple, Angus MacPhail, scen. & add. dial. W.P. Lipscombe, from play by Edward Knoblock, from novel by J.B. Priestley)

Friday the Thirteenth (1933, dir. Victor Saville, sc. Sidney Gilliat, Emlyn Williams, story by G.H. Moresby-White)

Channel Crossing (1933, dir. Milton Rosmer, sc. W.P. Lipscomb, add. dial. Cyril Campion)

Princess Charming (1934, dir. Maurice Elvy, sc. Arthur Wimperis, Lauri Wylie, add. dial. Robert Edmunds, L. du Garde Peach, from play by F. Martos)

Things Are Looking Up (1935, dir. Albert de Courville, sc. Con West, Stafford Davies, story by Daisy Fisher & Albert de Courville)

Warner Brothers-First National

Get Off My Foot (1935, dir. William Beaudine, sc. Frank Launder, Robert Edmunds, from play by Edward A. Paulton)

Educated Evans (1936, dir. William Beaudine, sc. Frank Launder, Robert Edmunds, from novel by Edgar Wallace)

Take It From Me aka *Transatlantic Trouble* (1937, dir. William Beaudine, sc. John Meehan Jr., J.O.C. Orton, story by Reginald Purdell)

Don't Get Me Wrong (1937, dir. Reginald Purdell, Arthur B. Woods, sc. Frank Launder, Reginald Purdell, Brock Williams)

Thank Evans (1938, dir. Roy William Neill, sc. John Dighton, Austin Melford, John Meehan Jr., from story by Edgar Wallace)

Everything Happens To Me (1938, dir. Roy William Neill, sc. John Dighton, Austin Melford)

The Good Old Days (1939, dir. Roy William Neill, sc. John Dighton, Austin Melford)

Hoots Mon (1939, dir. Roy William Neill, sc. John Dighton, Jack Henley)

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